

**THE D.C. OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM:  
PRESERVING SCHOOL CHOICE FOR ALL**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON  
HOMELAND SECURITY AND  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

OF THE

**ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS**

**FIRST SESSION**

**MAY 13, 2009**

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# **THE D.C. OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM: PRESERVING SCHOOL CHOICE FOR ALL**

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 2009**

U.S. SENATE,  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:03 a.m., in room SD-342, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Joseph I. Lieberman, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Lieberman, Akaka, Burris, Bennet, Collins, Voinovich, and Ensign.

## **OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN LIEBERMAN**

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Good morning, and welcome to this hearing of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. We are this morning considering the "D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Preserving School Choice For All," is the way we describe it. Good morning to everybody and thanks to the witnesses for being here.

It struck me as I walked over here that this is a program in the multi-trillion dollar Federal budget that is really very small in dollar numbers. But it arouses large interest, and I think it raises big hopes in the hearts and minds of the parents and the children who are involved in that program. And it is in that spirit that we hold this hearing today.

I want to first answer the question about why this Committee is holding the hearing because it may not be immediately obvious. It is not because Senator Collins and I happen to support the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP). It is because, first, the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee has historically had jurisdiction over matters related to the District of Columbia. So, for instance, earlier this year, we reported out the bill that would give District residents for the first time a voting representative in the House of Representatives. This afternoon, the Committee is holding hearings on the President's nomination of two people to be on the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. So this happens to be the D.C. related committee.

Second, during the vote on the D.C. House Voting Rights Act, a few senators submitted legislation to continue the authorization of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program for a period of years. This promised to put the bill into gridlock and give everybody a dif-

(1)

difficult choice to make. And a compromise was worked out in which the majority leader, Senator Reid, said that if those of us who had offered the amendment would withdraw it at this time, he would pledge that he would give floor time to a consideration of a measure reauthorizing the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program sometime this spring or, at the latest, early summer. And as part of that, I pledged, with Senator Collins' consent and agreement, to hold the hearing that we are holding today. So that is why we are here.

The second thing I want to say at the outset is that though I support this program and have from the beginning, and Senator Collins does as well, we have wanted this hearing to be a fair and open consideration of the pros and cons of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. We wanted, if you will, to hear from advocates and opponents, from both sides.

I do want to state for the record, and I think it bears noting, that we invited no less than six witnesses who are opposed to the reauthorization of this program to come and testify, and not a single one accepted our invitation. So I say that with regret because I wanted to hear both sides. We will hear from the principal investigator of the firm that the Department of Education chose to do an independent evaluation of this program, and he comes, as far as I know, with no particular bias. And so, in that sense, we will have some additional representation.

Now, let me just go to the history of the program to remind us all how we got to where we are.

The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program was authorized in the District of Columbia School Choice Incentive Act of 2003 and was passed by Congress in January 2004 as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of that year. The Act provided new funding—and this is very important—in equal parts for three recipients: The District of Columbia Public Schools—this was new funding for the D.C. Public Schools as part of an agreement. It was not previous funding. Second, funding went to the charter schools in the District; and, third, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship was funded.

There were findings in that law that Congress adopted, and it was signed by the President, that state that, "Available educational alternatives to the public schools are insufficient"—in other words, Congress made that finding—"and more educational options are needed. In particular, funds are needed to assist low-income parents to exercise choice among enhanced public opportunities and private education environments."

So the purpose of this program, the OSP, is to provide low-income parents residing in our Nation's capital, particularly parents of students who attend elementary or secondary schools that have been identified as needing improvement, corrective action, or restructuring, with expanded opportunities for enrolling their children in private schools in the District.

The Act directed the Secretary of Education of the United States to award a grant for up to 5 years to an eligible entity to operate the scholarship program, and it was the Washington Scholarship Fund that was chosen as the first grantee of the program.

As many here know, under the program, annual scholarships of up to \$7,500 per child are awarded to children from low-income families to attend private schools in the District. Funds appropriated for the program have been sufficient to support between 1,613 and 2,000 students annually.

As I suggested a moment ago, the Act mandated that an independent evaluation of the program be conducted to assess academic and non-academic outcomes, using the strongest possible research design for determining how effective the program has been. And that is when the Department of Education contracted with the Institute for Educational Sciences, whose principal investigator we will hear from this morning.

The most recent results, which were released on April 3 of this year, found that the program produced a statistically significant positive impact on reading, on parental satisfaction, and on parental confidence about school safety. Before that report came out, notwithstanding the fact that it had not come out, in the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009 adopted on March 11, 2009, an amendment was inserted that prohibits the Department of Education from admitting new applicants to the program beyond the coming school year. And, in fact, on April 9, letters were sent to the 630 students that had applied for vouchers for this September, including the 182 children who had already been informed that they would receive a scholarship, that the program was going to end.

On May 6, just last week, President Obama announced that he would support a proposal to allow current students to remain in the program through graduation but that no new students would be accepted to the program. That, I suppose, is a step forward, but with all due respect, in my opinion, it is simply not enough. If the Opportunity Scholarship Program is not working, it should be terminated for all children. If it is working well enough to be continued for those children currently in the program until they graduate from school, then it should also be continued for succeeding generations of new students.

The question I think to be asked of the Opportunity Scholarship Program, and any school program, should be whether it works, whether it improves the educational performance of the students involved. That is not a Democratic or a Republican question. It is not even an Independent question. It is not a liberal or a conservative question. It is a factual question based on factual information, including professional evaluations and test scores.

When I apply that non-ideological, non-partisan standard to the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program, my conclusion is that it works. It certainly works well enough to keep it going for new students. And I base that conclusion on the report of the independent evaluator, Patrick Wolf, who we will hear from today, who will tell us that under the most rigorous study design, this program is generating statistically significant educational achievement.

That is no small accomplishment because most experimental or innovative education programs, supported either by the Federal Government, State governments, or private philanthropies, do not show statistically significant results. In fact, of the 11 programs studied under similarly rigorous procedures to those applied to the

D.C. OSP, only 3 of 11 showed statistically significant results. So the analysis of the D.C. OSP stands out in sharp relief from the others as a successful educational reform program, and certainly one that should be continued.

Those who can afford to send their children to private schools, when they are dissatisfied with the public schools to which their children would otherwise go, do so for obvious reasons, to provide their children with the best education available. They do so as good parents who care about their children's future.

Why should we deny that opportunity to lower-income parents who want the best education and future for their children, too? In America, it should not be a privilege for any of our children to get a first-rate education. It should be, and in my opinion really is, a right, though it is a right that is too often not honored, particularly for our poorest children. Without a quality education for all, there cannot be equality for all, the kind of equality that our founding documents promise for all.

Finally, I am going to go back to one of my political heroes, former senator and former vice president, Hubert Humphrey, who once said that the moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy, and the handicapped.

In the District of Columbia today, with regard to this program, we must not allow the twilight to fall prematurely on a program that is clearly serving those in the dawn of life. And we cannot allow the shadows to fall on the dreams nurtured by that program in the children and parents who are today part of it. So I look forward to an informative and productive discussion this morning.

Senator Collins.

[The prepared statement of Senator Lieberman follows:]

#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR LIEBERMAN

Good morning and welcome to this hearing of the Senate's Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. This morning we are considering the "District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Preserving School Choice for All," as we describe it. It struck me as I walked over here that this is a program in the multi-trillion dollar Federal budget that is small in dollar numbers but it arouses large interest, and I think it raises big hopes in the hearts and minds of the parents and the children who are involved in that program, and it's in that spirit that we hold this hearing today.

I want to first answer the question, why is this Committee holding the hearing, because it may not be entirely obvious. It's not because Senator Collins and I happen to support the District of Columbia's Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP), although we do. It's because first, the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee has had jurisdiction over matters related to the District of Columbia. So for instance, earlier this year we reported out the bill that would give District residents for the first time voting representation in the House of Representatives. Later this afternoon, the Committee is holding hearings on the President's nomination of two people to be on the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. So, this happens to be the D.C. related committee.

Secondly, during the vote on the District of Columbia's Voting Rights Bill, a few senators submitted legislation to continue the authorization of the Opportunity Scholarship Program for a period of years. This promised to put the bill into gridlock and give everyone a difficult choice to make. A compromise was worked out in which the Majority Leader, Senator Reid, said that if those who had offered the amendment would withdraw it at this time, he would pledge to give floor time to the consideration of the Opportunity Scholarship Program this spring, at the latest

early summer. I pledged, with Senator Collins' consent and agreement, to hold this hearing, the hearing we are holding today, that's why we're here.

The third thing I want to say at the outset is that, although I have supported this program right from the beginning, and Senator Collins does as well, we wanted this hearing to be fair—a fair and open consideration of the pros and cons of the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program. We wanted to be able to hear from advocates and opponents of the Opportunity Scholarship Program. I do want to state for the record that we invited no less than six witnesses to come and testify about their alternative perspectives on this program and not a single one accepted our invitation. I say that with regret, because I wanted to hear both sides.

We will hear from the principle investigator from the firm that the Department of Education chose to do an independent evaluation of this program, and he comes with, as far as I know, no particular bias.

Now let me just go to the history of the program, to tell us all how we got to where we are. The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program was authorized by the District of Columbia School Choice Incentive Act of 2003, passed by Congress in January 2004 as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2004, Public Law 108-199 (Title III of Division C of the Act). The Act provided new funding, in equal parts, for D.C. public schools, charter schools, and scholarships. The findings under the law state that “available educational alternatives to the public schools are insufficient, and more educational options are needed. In particular, funds are needed to assist low-income parents to exercise choice among enhanced public opportunities and private education environments.”

The purpose of the OSP program is to provide low-income parents residing in the District, particularly parents of students who attend elementary or secondary schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring, with expanded opportunities for enrolling their children in private schools in the District. The Act directed the Secretary of Education to award a grant for up to five years to an eligible entity to operate the program. The Washington Scholarship Fund (WSF) was chosen as the first grantee of the program. Under the OSP annual scholarships of up to \$7,500 per child are awarded to children from low-income families to attend private schools in the District.

Funds appropriated for the program have been sufficient to support between 1,613 and 2000 students. The Act also mandated that an independent evaluation of the program be conducted to assess academic and non-academic outcomes, using the strongest possible research design for determining program effectiveness. The study was conducted by contract for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). The most recent IES study was released April 3, 2009, and found that the program produced a statistically significant positive impact on reading. The study also found that for parents, the program had a positive impact overall on school satisfaction and perceptions of school safety.

The Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009, which became Public Law 111-8 on March 11, 2009, included funds for the OSP program for the 2009–2010 school year. The Omnibus bill also imposed certain requirements on the OSP program, and included a proviso stating that no funds after that school year would be available for the OSP program unless a reauthorization bill is passed by Congress, and there is legislation from the District of Columbia approving such reauthorization. Thereafter, the Department of Education decided that no new applicants could be accepted for the 2009–2010 school year, and on April 9, letters were sent to the 630 students that had applied for vouchers for this September, including the 182 children who had already been informed that they would receive a scholarship, that the program was going to end. On May 6, 2009, President Obama announced that he would support a proposal to allow current students to remain in the program through graduation, but not new students.

That I suppose is a step forward, but with all due respect, in my opinion, it's simply not enough. If the Opportunity Scholarship Program is not working, it should be terminated for all children. If it is working well enough for the children who are continuing in the program until they graduate from school, then it should also be continued for new generations of students.

The question I think to be asked of the OSP program and any school program should be whether it works, whether it improves the educational performance of the students involved? That's not a Democratic or Republican question, or even an Independent question. It's not a liberal or conservative question. It is a factual question based on factual information including professional evaluations and test scores.

For the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, my conclusion is that it works. It certainly works well enough to keep it going for new students. I've based that conclusion on the report of the independent evaluator, Patrick Wolf, who we'll hear from today to tell us that under the most rigorous studies this program is gener-

ating statistically effective educational achievement, and that's no small accomplishment. Most experimental or innovative education programs funded by the Federal Government, state government, or private philanthropies do not show statistically significant results. In fact, of the 11 programs studied under similarly rigorous procedures to those applied to the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, only three of 11 showed statistically significant results. So the analysis of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program stands out in sharp relief. It's a successful educational reform program and certainly one that should be continued.

Those who can afford to send their children to private schools when they are dissatisfied with the public schools their children would otherwise go to, do so for obvious reasons: to provide their children with the best education available. They do so as good parents who care about their children's future. Why should we deny that opportunity to lower income parents who also want the best future for their children?

In America it should not be a privilege for any of our children to get a first rate education. In my opinion it is a right, although often a right that is not honored. Without an equal education for all there cannot be equality for all, the kind of equality that our founding documents promised.

I'm going to go back to one of my political heroes, former Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who observed that the "moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped."

In D.C. today, we must not allow the twilight to fall on a program that is clearly serving those in the dawn of life. And we cannot allow the shadows to fall on the dreams that nurtured that program in the children and parents who are today a part of it.

I look forward to an informative and productive discussion. Senator Collins?

#### OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR COLLINS

Senator COLLINS. Mr. Chairman, first let me thank you for convening this hearing today and also for your very eloquent statement, which sums up why we are here today.

This Committee has convened to consider the merits of extending a program that has provided additional educational options for some of our Nation's most at-risk children. Sadly, the District's public schools continue to underperform despite an expenditure per pupil rate that is the third highest in the Nation. Experts have carefully studied the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program and have concluded that the educational success of the program's participants in reading has outpaced those in the District's public schools.

The personal success stories that we will hear today help us put a face on what is really happening. A lot of times in the Senate, we debate budget amounts, we look at statistics and studies, but we do not always hear the personal stories of those who are affected by the policy decisions that we make. And that is why I so look forward to hearing the testimony of our two students today.

I also look forward to hearing the testimony of a mother whose son is a second grader who has been able to take advantage of this program, but whose daughter apparently will be denied the opportunity to follow in her brother's footsteps. These stories help us understand the real world implications of cutting off this promising program.

As the Chairman has indicated, more than 5 years ago, leaders in the District of Columbia, including the former mayor, whom I see today in the audience, worked with Congress to design a three-sector strategy that provided new funding for D.C.'s public schools,

public charter schools, and other educational opportunities for the children of the District.

The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program provides federally funded scholarships that have enabled low-income students from the public school system to attend a private school of their choice. For many of these students, this has been their first and their only opportunity to access a private education that previously was available only to the children of wealthier families.

The program's popularity is illustrated by the long line of parents waiting to enroll their children. Since its inception, more than 7,000 students have applied for scholarships, far more than the program can accommodate. That should tell us something. That, too, is an indication of the desirability of this program.

I would note that the President's fiscal year 2010 budget provides \$74 million to the District's public schools. Of that amount, \$42 million is to improve the public schools; \$20 million is to support the public charter schools; and \$12 million is for the Opportunity Scholarship Program. Unfortunately, that \$12 million, as the Chairman has pointed out, would only allow those currently enrolled students to continue in the program. No new students would be permitted, despite the fact that the breakdown clearly indicates that the additional Federal funds are not diverting money from the public schools. Moreover, the \$7,500 per student cost for the scholarship children compares very favorably to the \$15,511 per student cost for the public schools.

The stories that we have heard from the parents and the students participating in this program, as well as the testimony that we will hear from the experts today, should guide our decision-making. We will hear from the University of Arkansas researchers on their study, which showed that parents are overwhelmingly satisfied with their children's experience in this program.

In March, the Department of Education released its evaluation of the program's impact after 3 years. It showed that the students offered scholarships experienced improvements in reading that were equal to more than 3 months of additional schooling. Similar progress has not yet, however, been realized in math. I would like to learn more about that. Nevertheless, it is clear that if Congress were to discontinue funding for the Opportunity Scholarship Program, it is estimated that 86 percent of the students would be reassigned to schools that do not meet "adequate yearly progress" goals in reading and math. How can we allow that to happen?

I do also want to expand on what the Chairman said. Our goal is to look at the facts and success or the problems with this program in an impartial, factually based way. And we extended several invitations to individuals who have reservations about the program. We invited, for example, the Mayor, and I wish he were here today so that we could hear his recommendations and explore his views. We invited the National Education Association, which declined the opportunity to attend this hearing. It is very unfortunate that they have chosen not to participate since we would have welcomed their views. Nevertheless, I look forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses who know firsthand the difference that this program has made in their own lives.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Senator Collins follows:]

#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR COLLINS

Today's hearing on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program allows the Committee to consider the merits of a program that has provided additional educational options for some of our Nation's most at-risk children.

Sadly, D.C.'s public schools continue to underperform despite an expenditure per pupil rate that is the third-highest in the Nation. Experts have carefully studied the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program and concluded that the educational success of the program's participants in reading has outpaced those in the D.C. public schools.

The personal success stories that we will hear today of Tiffany Dunston, a freshman at Syracuse University and last year's valedictorian of Archbishop Carroll High School, and Ronald Holassie, a sophomore at Archbishop Carroll High School and D.C. Deputy Youth Mayor for legislative affairs, are testament to this program's achievements. LaTasha Bennett, whose son is a second grader at Naylor Road School, but whose daughter apparently will be denied the opportunity to follow in her brother's footsteps, will help us understand the real world implications of discontinuing the program.

More than 5 years ago, leaders in the District of Columbia, working with Congress, designed a "three-sector" strategy that provided new funding for public schools, public charter schools, and educational options for needy children. The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program provides federally funded scholarships that have enabled low-income students from the public school system to attend a private school of their choice. For many of these students, this was their first and only opportunity to access a private education that previously was available only to the children of wealthier families.

The program's popularity is illustrated by the long line of parents waiting to enroll their children. Since its inception, more than 7,000 students have applied for scholarships.

Of the \$74 million for D.C. public schools in the President's fiscal year 2010 budget, \$42 million is to improve the District's public schools, \$20 million is to support D.C. public charter schools, and \$12 million is for the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. Unfortunately, the \$12 million provided for the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program would only allow currently enrolled students to remain in the program. No new students would be permitted, despite the fact that the \$7,500 per student cost for scholarship children compares favorably to the \$15,511 per student cost for public schools.

The stories we've heard from parents and students participating in the program, as well as the testimony we will hear from our panel today, parallels what we've learned from recent independent studies conducted by the University of Arkansas and the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education.

In December 2009, University of Arkansas researchers released the findings of a new evaluation entitled "Family Reflections on the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program." The study showed that parents were overwhelmingly satisfied with their children's experience in the program.

In March 2009, the Department of Education released its evaluation of the program's impact after 3 years. This report showed that students offered scholarships experienced improvements in reading that were equal to more than 3 months of additional schooling, while parents were increasingly satisfied with the quality and safety of their children's schools. Similar progress has not yet been realized in math, however.

Nevertheless, if Congress were to discontinue funding for the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, it is estimated that 86 percent of the students would be reassigned to schools that do not meet "adequate yearly progress" goals in reading and math. We should not allow that to happen.

Despite invitations to testify before the Committee, Mayor Adrian Fenty and the National Education Association declined the opportunity to attend this hearing and express their thoughts on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. It is unfortunate that they have chosen not to participate since we would have welcomed their views.

I look forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses who know first-hand what a positive difference the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has made in their lives.



Chairman LIEBERMAN. Thank you, Senator Collins, for that excellent statement. Thanks for your commitment to both this program and to a fair consideration of it.

We are going to go right to the witnesses. Sometime before long, unfortunately, we are probably going to be called for a vote on the Senate floor. We will go over quickly and come back, so we may have to recess. But we are very honored to have this first panel of a parent and two students, including a former student in the program. So let us begin with Latasha Bennett, a parent from the Naylor Road School.

Ms. Bennett, thanks so much for being here today.

**TESTIMONY OF LATASHA BENNETT,<sup>1</sup> PARENT, NAYLOR ROAD SCHOOL**

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Senator Collins, Members of the Committee, and fellow citizens. Thank you for inviting me to share my views on the Opportunity Scholarship Program and its impacts on my family and my child.

My name is Latasha Bennett. I am a 37-year-old single parent of two intelligent children, my son, Nico Thomas, who is 8 years old and attends Naylor Road through the Opportunity Scholarship Program; and Nia, who is 4 years old, who has been denied a scholarship, and she will be attending kindergarten this coming year.

My annual income is approximately \$12,200; therefore, I fit the criteria for the low-income guidelines for the program. I am currently unemployed due to a disability that prevents me from having long-term employment. I worked, first of all, since I was 14 years old until the year 2000 when I initially became disabled. For several years, I have waited and went back to attempt to regain employment. Unfortunately, that employment venture did not last long.

I worked as a supervisor for Identification and Records at the Metropolitan Police Department. I love working and performing supervisor and management duties. I cannot wait to get back to work when I am able.

The Opportunity Scholarship Program has been a true blessing for me as well as Nico. He loves his school, his teachers, the staff, and his friends. Nico is a part of the reading and the debate clubs. He now wants to become a doctor. His class consists of 12 students, which allows them more hands-on learning, and it gives them better attention, and they learn two times better than they would in a public school environment, which would be larger classes. And they are given more attention as well, in the private school.

The D.C. public school that is assigned to my neighborhood would be Birney Elementary, which is totally unacceptable for a school because of the Opportunity Scholarship Program being on the chopping block. And I cannot afford to send him to the Naylor Road School myself.

I already lost a nephew through D.C. public schools. You may remember, February 2, 2004, the young gentleman, James Richardson, 17 years old, who was gunned down in Ballou Senior High School. That was my nephew who was shot. I wonder if he had the

<sup>1</sup> The prepared statement of Ms. Bennett appears in the Appendix on page 47.

opportunity to have a scholarship would he be sitting here today as a success story. The school and his neighborhood had low expectations for the students, and that right there, to me, made me want to be a parent of a child that excels in the future.

The scholarship provides my child an opportunity to be in a quality educational environment. They are also bright and willing to learn. My daughter, Nia, who is 4 years old, receives a Department of Human Services (DHS) voucher through the District of Columbia, which I also qualify for because of my income.

I fought and advocated for her to attend Naylor Road School Annex because at the beginning they were not accepting DHS vouchers. But I fought, and I inquired back in July of last year. They applied for the vouchers, and they were approved, through the DHS program, to accept vouchers in December. The next day, she became a student at the Annex. She started immediately.

She now knows all of her letters. She knows how to write her name. She is very articulate. This program has been a great success for my daughter. I am grateful to Washington, DC, for the voucher program for pre-kindergarten so that she can learn and get ready for the kindergarten.

I applied for Nia to get a D.C. Opportunity Scholarship so that she could attend Naylor Road School for the 2009–2010 year to be with her brother. Initially, she was eligible for the scholarship, and I received the eligibility letter, and I was so elated. Then, a retraction letter came. Of course, I was devastated and angry. I wanted Nia to have the same opportunity to excel as well as her brother is. And Nia is so looking forward to going to Naylor Road. She often asks me, “Mom, when will I go to school with Nico?” And I used to tell her soon. Now, I do not know what to tell her. Because of the Opportunity Scholarship Program being on the chopping block, I have no answer for her.

My children really need this program to continue. Without it, I truly do not have a clue as to where I will send them. My assigned neighborhood school, which is Birney Elementary off of Martin Luther King, is totally an unacceptable place, and the options are so limited this late in the season.

I would like to ask Secretary Arne Duncan, how is it that my child should not be given the same opportunity as his children to get the best education possible? And I ask Mayor Fenty and President Obama to get involved. The children are our future, and education is what is necessary for our future. Without that, what kind of future do we have?

I attended the rally last week at Freedom Plaza. We submitted over 7,000 D.C. residents’ signatures on a petition that agreed with us to continue this Opportunity Scholarship Program. And I am asking, humbly, the President, the Senators, Mayor Fenty, everybody, and I am pleading with you all to rescind that decision to deny the new applicants, as well as those children that were given scholarships.

Education is the No. 1 priority in my household, and by allotting Federal funding toward this program, it is a success. It shows great improvement in the government’s decisionmaking. It is evident that the program is working because the statistics show the students have higher test scores. The program shows that low-income

children can excel when given the opportunity. It gives parents such as myself hope for our future.

My children's future depends on this opportunity. They have bright goals for their future. My son wants to be a doctor; my daughter wants to be an actress and intends to go to Hollywood one day. [Laughter.]

But without the proper education, how would they get to those goals?

Remember, our children are our future, and without this proper education, what type of future will we have? So please recommit to this outstanding program. And I thank you, and so do Nico and Nia, in advance, because we do believe that you all will make the right decision when it comes to education.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Thanks so very much, Ms. Bennett, for an excellent statement. I think you said at one point that your children were articulate. I would say that their mother is articulate as well.

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Incidentally, you mentioned the 7,000 signatures. These were delivered to us today. So the Committee has them, and they will be part of our record as well.<sup>1</sup> Thank you.

Next, we have Tiffany Dunston, who is a former student at Archbishop Carroll High School here in the District.

Ms. Dunston, thanks. Please proceed.

**TESTIMONY OF TIFFANY DUNSTON,<sup>2</sup> FORMER STUDENT,  
ARCHBISHOP CARROLL HIGH SCHOOL**

Ms. DUNSTON. Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. Thank you for having a hearing on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. It is a tremendous honor being a recipient of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. And I want to thank you for allowing me to speak with you about my experiences with the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program.

I had a dream of going to Archbishop Carroll High School, but that was not possible. I lived with my grandmother, who is disabled, and she could not afford to send me to the school of my choice. She applied for the scholarship because she wanted the best education for me. Receiving a scholarship was a blessing for my family and put me on the path to success. I grew up in a neighborhood with a lot of poverty and crime, and there were such low expectations for kids in my neighborhood schools.

My family also experienced our own tragedy. My motivation to get the best education possible was my cousin, James Dunston, who was shot and killed at 17. James was planning to attend college and play basketball. My cousin was going to be the first college graduate in my family, but he died before he was given that opportunity. Now, I am trying to step in his shoes and finish what he started.

To my family and to myself, I am a representation of what he could have done for my family and community. Through the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, I was afforded the opportunity

<sup>1</sup>The petitions referenced by Chairman Lieberman are on file with the Chief Clerk in the Committee offices.

<sup>2</sup>The prepared statement of Ms. Dunston appears in the Appendix on page 50.

to do just that. With the help of the scholarship, my dream was realized. I had a say, a choice, in my education.

Now, when I look back on my high school years, I can definitely say that I came a long way. This personal journey was made possible by my education at Archbishop Carroll High School. The environment at Carroll is so different from public schools in Washington, DC, from the activities and curriculum to the way we are expected to treat our peers and our studies. I was constantly pushed to be a better person and individual student.

At a public school, there are constant distractions from school work. With the scholarship, I was able to attend a school that provided a caring environment as well as a school where one-on-one relationships with teachers were possible. Additionally, Archbishop Carroll gives you a moral education, what is right and what to not do. The rigorous environment provided by Archbishop Carroll helped me to become the hard-working student I am today.

I just finished my freshman year at Syracuse University, where I received almost a full scholarship. I am excited to go back for my sophomore year and plan on majoring in biochemistry and minoring in French.

I do look at myself as a D.C. success story, but I am not the only one who has seen such an achievement. I have friends who are in the same places I am. They were able to have a scholarship, and they are so happy with their experiences and how their future now looks.

I was lucky enough to receive the Opportunity Scholarship for all 4 years at Carroll High School. Had my scholarship been terminated halfway through, I would not have been able to graduate from Archbishop Carroll High School at the top of my class. I am so grateful for this opportunity and sad that the other families will not have the same opportunity for their children if this program is terminated.

While I was able to come a long way, I see the challenges that kids in D.C. still face. I am determined to be a part of this fight to continue this scholarship for other students. I have been very blessed and would like others to have the same opportunity. I am determined to build a better environment for those who are in need. I am on the path to success and hope others will have the same opportunity.

You have the ability to give other D.C. children the opportunity I had. My education gave me the chance at a successful story and future. Please do not end a program that worked for me and is benefiting tons of other students.

Three years from now, I will be walking across the stage receiving my college diploma, and none of this would have been possible without the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. Thank you.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Thank you very much. Your story is really not just evidence of the impact of the program, but it is an inspirational story. And, of course, all the program does is give a scholarship for an opportunity, then individuals have to make the most of it, which you obviously did. I know that you were the valedictorian in your graduating year at Archbishop Carroll, and you had a grade point average (GPA) not of 4, but of 4.1.

[Applause.]

Chairman LIEBERMAN. We will not ask the Senators here what their GPA was, including me. [Laughter.]

The final witness on this panel is Ronald Holassie, who is now a student at Archbishop Carroll.

Thanks so much for being here.

**TESTIMONY OF RONALD HOLASSIE,<sup>1</sup> STUDENT, ARCHBISHOP CARROLL HIGH SCHOOL**

Mr. HOLASSIE. Thank you, too. My name is Ronald Holassie. I am currently Deputy Youth Mayor for Legislative Affairs for the District of Columbia. I am excelling and soaring to success. This program has changed my life and has made me the successful young man standing before you now.

I credit this program greatly for my success, but it all started in sixth grade. My mother was extremely concerned about my education. I was coming home almost every night with no homework and with poor grades. She was on the verge of sending me to her home country, Trinidad, to go to school. Right around that time, she found out about the Opportunity Scholarship Program, and she applied for me, and I was soon accepted. She felt that now I had a chance to get a high quality education and have a bright future.

Now, presently, I am about to go on to the 11th grade, which I now have found out will be my last year. Right before 12th grade, my road to a brighter future and success will be shut down. Everything in my high school years will be lost. My road to a brighter future will be stalled. My future of success will become a lost dream. But that cannot happen. It should never happen.

I say this and mean this: No one should take away my future of success and the future of the other 1,700 young children in this program. I will once again say, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program must continue. There is no if, and, or but about it. Just as I have changed and evolved so much as a person, other Opportunity Scholarship Program recipients are doing so as well.

It is not only about me and the other 1,700 recipients. I want other children to have the same opportunity of school choice as well. We are the future of Washington, DC, the United States of America, and the world. This program is so powerful as it can change an individual and make him a better, more successful person with a brighter future just like me. Everyone should have a choice, and everyone should have the right to school choice.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Holassie; an excellent statement. If we continue the program, even for the year or for people in it, you will have the opportunity to stay in it through graduation. But, obviously, we should act to make sure, first, to guarantee that; second, to make sure that others can have the opportunity you did.

I am just going to ask one or two quick questions.

Ms. Bennett, you indicated at one point that if the program is not extended and your daughter cannot use it and go to the same school as your son, that you find the public school that she would go to unacceptable.

<sup>1</sup> The prepared statement of Mr. Holassie appears in the Appendix on page 52.

I just want to ask you, because it is important for us to know, why is it unacceptable and what have you found different and better, presumably, in the school that your son goes to?

Ms. BENNETT. Well, for starters, the school that is in my neighborhood is Birney Elementary School. I went to the school personally to observe what takes place throughout the day. And I observed no type of security. I observed students running up and down the hallway. I observed the principal not looking professional or even playing the part of a principal. I observed no type of discipline in the environment, just observing.

At my son's school, Naylor Road School, first of all, it is secure. For entrance, any person, even parents, you have to go to the office to be permitted in any of the buildings. They do not need security officers because there are secured, locked doors, and before you are permitted to enter, you have to go into the office.

It also gives them—because the buildings are like homes—a home type environment, each particular building, and it has smaller classes. It is a more safe environment. You do not even see children running outside. I mean, when I investigated the school prior to enrolling Nico there, I thought, wow, children go there? Because you normally see children running outside of the school, but it is so well maintained and so well disciplined.

After my initial investigation of the school, I had to choose that school for him. It is much better. It is a safe environment. I do not want to lose my son or my daughter to a public school like my nephew, where everything is going on and it is not secure. It is not safe from what I observed, the public school in my neighborhood.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. I appreciate what you have said because it is possible that some people might say, well, the parental confidence about the security of a school is not an educational factor. But of course it is.

Ms. BENNETT. Yes.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. I would not want my child in a school that was unsafe because how could the child learn in an unsafe environment? And, of course, I would worry about the child's safety as a basic fact.

I was thinking as I was listening to you, just to say it briefly, we all wish that every public school in Washington and everywhere else in America was the best and gave the best opportunity for an education to every one of our children, but wishing that does not make it so.

It happens in the District that Mayor Fenty and Chancellor Rhee, I think, have worked very aggressively and imaginably to try to improve the public schools, but they are just not all where we need them to be now. Then the question becomes are we going to sacrifice the hopes of your children and these two extraordinary young people, and others like them wanting something better, while we are working to improve the public schools?

I want to ask Tiffany and Ronald to take a moment and just describe what were the most significant changes for the better that you experienced when you went from the public schools to Archbishop Carroll?

Ms. DUNSTON. Well, there are several differences between a public school and Archbishop Carroll High School. For example, as Ms.

Bennett mentioned earlier, I attended Birney Elementary School, and right now there is no progression I can see, as far as my observing the school now.

When I left Birney Elementary School, I attended a charter school, and it was similar to a regular D.C. public school. We were in trailers. It was not a building at all, so that kind of hindered my ability to be successful as far as environment-wise. And when I went to Archbishop Carroll High School, it was just a whole transition altogether, as far as the safety nets that teachers provided for the students and the nurturing environment. And the challenging curriculum was just something different for me and made me a better person.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Thank you. Mr. Holassie, do you want to add?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Oh, I feel that there are many differences. I feel that there are more expectations in private schools, and also Catholic schools, than there are in the public schools. Educationally, academically, the expectations for that are much higher.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. So you felt that the teachers expected you to do better, and in a very real way, that helped you do better.

Mr. HOLASSIE. Yes. The teachers in the private schools and Catholic schools really want me to succeed. I did not get that motivation in public schools.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. That is very important. Senator Collins.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you.

Let me thank all of you for your excellent and compelling testimony. I just have one question before we are going to have to go to vote. And I am going to ask Tiffany and Ronald to respond to the same question.

We want to improve D.C.'s public schools as well, and I want to reinforce what the Chairman said. But I would be interested in your observations on the differences in your lives versus your friends who are left behind in the public schools that you left.

Where are they now? What has happened to them? And do you believe that your ability to take advantage of this scholarship program helped you advance in ways that perhaps they have not been able to?

Ronald, we will start with you.

Mr. HOLASSIE. Well, I feel that having the opportunity of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, it absolutely changed me as a person and helped me to evolve. I feel that, actually, it is the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, and we need opportunities for scholarships for children in the District of Columbia, and those opportunities will greatly benefit them.

Senator COLLINS. Tiffany, was there a difference for you compared to students who perhaps applied but did not get an Opportunity Scholarship because there was not enough funding?

Ms. DUNSTON. I know several students who also applied for the scholarship that went to Carroll High School, who are now at colleges. I have a friend who is at Spelman College. She went through the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program as well.

But other friends that went to D.C. public schools, I observed them just in the streets. I guess they are working, or not attending school, but they are not on the level that I know they could have

been if they would have just tried to be successful in their education.

Senator COLLINS. So their future does not look as bright as yours does as the result of your having this opportunity.

Ms. DUNSTON. Yes.

Senator COLLINS. Is that correct?

Ms. DUNSTON. Yes, ma'am.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you. Would you agree with that, too?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Yes, I would agree.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Senator Voinovich, the vote is on. We have about 7 minutes left.

Do you want to try some questions now or do you want to wait until we come back?

Senator VOINOVICH. I would rather wait until we get back.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. That is good.

So we are going to stand in recess. Do not go far because we will try to get over to the Capitol and back real quickly.

[Recess.]

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Let me ask everyone, please, to take your seats again, and we will begin to recommence the hearing. I thank you very much for your patience. I am sorry that we had to break. I think there will not be another vote for a while, so, hopefully, we will be able to go right through, finish this panel, and go on to the second panel.

When we stopped, Senator Voinovich was next, and then we will go to Senator Burris.

#### OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR VOINOVICH

Senator VOINOVICH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding this hearing, and thank you for the very eloquent speech that you gave in your opening statement in terms of the quality of this program that we put in place several years ago. And, of course, the students who are here spoke eloquently about what a great program it is.

I would like to give Mr. Chairman a little history here. When I first met Mayor Williams—and, Mayor, thank you so much for being here—I was on the Oversight of Government Management and the District of Columbia Subcommittee. Now, it is the Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia Subcommittee. And I said to him that the District of Columbia's school system ought to be a school system on the shining hill, something to be looked up to around the country, and that with half the kids dropping out of our urban school districts, Ohio, my State, and this Nation cannot be successful.

So we worked with the mayor and other people. And, Mr. Chairman, we created the District of Columbia Tuition Assistance Grant Program (DC TAG). We discovered that District students did not have an opportunity for higher education except for the District of Columbia, and so we put a program in place to provide them with up to \$10,000 for out-of-state scholarship money. And I suspect, Tiffany, you may have taken advantage of the DC TAG Program.

In addition to that, Don Graham of the *Washington Post* and the business people got together and created the District of Columbia



College Access Program (DC CAP). And we have seen the greatest increase in college attendance in the District. I think it is 60 percent, the biggest that has happened anywhere in the country.

Then in 2004, Mr. Chairman, when we had this opportunity of helping the schools, we said, let us provide more money for the public schools, let us provide some money for charter schools, and then let us look into this issue of scholarships. And I was particularly aware of the scholarship program because it was a program that I helped start when I was governor of the State of Ohio. And I recall that the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers were opposed to it, and they said that the reason they were opposed to it was because it was unconstitutional. I felt that it was constitutional. And ultimately, in the *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* case on June 27, 2002, the Supreme Court said it is constitutional.

We put this program in place, and the thought was that we are going to try to make a big difference in the District. And I would like to say, the District has made some significant improvement. But it is outrageous to me today that we are cutting this program off with yet a year to go. We should not even be here. We should not be having these hearings. I think the President coming out and saying we are going to let the program continue but no new kids—Mr. Chairman, I agree with you. If it is a bad program, then we ought to get rid of it. If it is a good program, we should continue it. And I do not think the President should allow the heat to be taken off of him by saying, well, we will let it keep going.

The real problem here today—and everybody in this room ought to know this—is that this is a democracy that we are in, and we have people that lobby the Senate. But the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers do not like this program. And the thing that disturbs me—and, children, this is a lesson for you and your parents—is that they are not here today. They do not have the guts to come here and look at Tiffany in the eye and Ronald in the eye and Latasha in the eye and say, you know what, we are going to cut off your program.

Now, if this is such a bad thing, where are they?

Where are they, Mr. Chairman? This is outrageous. Not only should we be outraged here in this community in D.C., but we should be outraged nationally that somebody can reach into the process and somehow work in an amendment to a piece of legislation, cut off the money for a program, and not have to stand up and be counted and tell us why they think this should be done.

[Applause.]

Senator VOINOVICH. So, Mr. Chairman, I think that one of the things that we ought to talk about—I know what is going to happen here. We will have these hearings, and then it will go to our Committee, and we will probably have a vote out of our Committee, and then we will maybe not have the votes because of the pressure from the teachers' unions. And the leader has promised us that we will have a vote on the floor, I believe; we can discuss this.

But what should happen is that Mayor Fenty and Michelle Rhee, and a few other people in this community, should call the leadership of the Democratic Party, and maybe some Republicans, and say, look, folks, let us just let this thing go. Let us just give them

money for another year while we discuss this and let it go, instead of going through all of this that we are going through today. That is what we should be doing.

So I would say this. Let us start thinking about our children. The D.C. school system is improving, but it is not where it should be. And when I heard that they were going to shut off this program, it was a discordant note.

I do not know if you know this or not, but the Gates Foundation is going to put \$140 million into the District during the next 10 years, and to regions where they have 60 percent dropout rates. So we are making progress. And the fact that we are supporting this program does not mean that we do not support the public school system. We do. We want it to get better. And I learned a long time ago that if you have some measuring and some competition, it has a way of improving the overall system.

Tiffany, please repeat again why you think that you had more of an opportunity when you took advantage of the scholarship. Tell us again.

Ms. DUNSTON. Well, I believe that the Opportunity Scholarship Program has made me a better individual and student because it motivated me to be successful and guided me on that path to be successful. And it just challenged me as far as going to a different school, a Catholic school versus a public school. It was just a whole transition of becoming better. The environment challenged me because socially I was challenged when I was living in a poverty environment, so I just made myself a better individual as far as getting through my education.

Senator VOINOVICH. Were you a good student in the public schools?

Ms. DUNSTON. Yes.

Senator VOINOVICH. And are you living with your grandmother?

Ms. DUNSTON. Yes, my grandmother and my mom, they just wanted a better education for me. They knew that Ballou or Anacostia High School was just going to degrade me and make me nothing more.

Senator VOINOVICH. Ronald, how about you? Let us talk about you a little bit more and what you have gained from this.

Mr. HOLASSIE. You are saying what I have gained from the opportunity?

Senator VOINOVICH. Yes, from the opportunity. That is right.

How do you feel it is different than, say, if you had stayed where you were before?

Mr. HOLASSIE. If I had stayed where I was before, I would not be at this point that I am now. I would not be deputy youth mayor. My way of thinking is totally different now. I feel that I am more intelligent, and I am headed toward a brighter future.

Senator VOINOVICH. You came into the program how long ago, 4 or 5 years?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Six years ago. I came into the program the first year.

Senator VOINOVICH. At the time you were in school, were you thinking about going to college at that time?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Yes. I always knew I would go to college.

Senator VOINOVICH. And why did you know that?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Because, I mean, it is a priority. You have to go to college to be successful in life.

Senator VOINOVICH. Tiffany, you are the first in your family to go on to college?

Ms. DUNSTON. Yes, sir.

Senator VOINOVICH. Well, I would just like to say, Mr. Chairman, that it would be wonderful if somebody behind the scenes would take care of this, take care of it in the Appropriations Committee or someplace else, so we do not have to continue to go through all of this when we know the real problem here is that there is a couple of special interest groups that do not want to see this take place. And the American people should know it. That is too bad.

Ms. DUNSTON. I have a question. Can I ask—

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Wait a second, now. [Laughter.]

I know you have a 4.1 GPA, but we are supposed to ask the questions. But go ahead, please.

Ms. DUNSTON. You stated that you wanted to make the D.C. public schools better.

What are the steps to making it better? What are the plans to make them better?

[Applause.]

Senator VOINOVICH. Real quickly. First of all, I think that Mayor Fenty has continued the commitment of Mayor Williams that one of the most important things in the District is to improve the school system.

Second of all, I think that you were able to attract an outstanding leader in Michelle Rhee, and she is working with the community. And they systematically are working on programs that are going to incrementally improve the school system. From my perspective, they are making great progress. And they will continue to make great progress if we can continue our charter schools and have a variety of opportunities that are available in the District as we move forward.

Ms. DUNSTON. All right. Thank you.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. All right. Thanks, Senator Voinovich. Thanks for your passion, really, and your outrage because it is something to be outraged about. I appreciate it.

Mr. Holassie, I want you to know—you could not see. I believe that is your dad sitting over to the—

Is that right?

He just had the biggest smile on his face when you explained that you were always going to go to college simply because it was a priority. And I think that goes back to him.

Senator Burris.

#### OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR BURRIS

Senator BURRIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I am concerned. Where are the public schools? Were they invited to testify today?

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Yes. I have not mentioned names, but we did invite both Mayor Fenty and Chancellor Rhee. We also invited the representatives of the two teachers' unions and some others who have been opponents of this program, and none of them would accept the invitation.

Senator BURRIS. I see. I certainly am honored to hear these distinguished students and to hear their positions and their testimony, which was terrific. We are really pulling for you.

My whole problem is that I can go get you some students in a public school, and they also went to college, and they also did very well, whether or not they had parental guidance or parental direction. What I am hearing from the testimony here is that all the public school kids are destined to be whatever, and I do not think that is what we are trying to convey here.

I mean, we have some money that is going to help some children, and if we had money to help all children, perhaps we could have more people testifying, probably more people going to school and getting out of the poverty situation.

I commend you young people. But I remember when we grew up, poverty did not determine our education. Our commitment and our parents determined our education. And you have to have your own goals and your own ambition to set that pace, and education is a vehicle to do that.

So, Mr. Chairman, I have serious problems with the implications that have been put out here that money is going to be the answer to our children being successful and that there are some problems with the public schools. We also have schools, whether they are public or parochial or chartered, that have children that do not make it or children that are failures. So we can bring in students from all those charter schools that did not make it.

So I am concerned that we are giving a bad impression here for a program that came into existence 5 years ago that has helped some people, and now the assessment of those programs, which, of course, are called vouchers, is running out, and there are some people saying that there is very little change in the overall improvement of most of the students.

I understand that from my research that the only thing that improved a little bit for those 1,600 students that are involved in the program was reading. There has been no change in the math scores. And so, I do not want to have the wrong impression being communicated here that this program is the be all and end all for the problems, and vouchers are the be all and end all for the problems of our school children. I do not think that they are.

We have to deal with what is happening in our public schools and make sure we correct those public schools. And if people are fortunate enough to go to a parochial school or a chartered school, then that is fine. But we cannot put the onus on public schools and not fund public education when it is the obligation of the government to see to it that our students are educated. And if we polled every school in the District of Columbia and pulled out some students and put them into a special program and gave them that special kind of attention, I guarantee you they would do better. And that is what we must concentrate on for every class, every school, not only in the District of Columbia, but in my city of Chicago or in the State of Illinois. We have a strong feeling about how we handle those charter schools.

So I want to commend you young people. You do what you are supposed to do. And I know a lot of kids who have gone to public schools who also are going to be able to go to Princeton, are going

to be able to go to college, are going to be able to go to Southern Illinois University, and are going to be able to go to Howard because they went to a public school. The fact that you went to a charter school is certainly a blessing, but that does not mean that the kids in a public school are not going to make it either.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Thanks, Senator Burris.

Look, I said briefly earlier that this is not against the public schools. This is part of a—

Did you want to say something, Ronald?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Yes, I did.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Go ahead.

Mr. HOLASSIE. I would like to say about the public school situation that right now at the present time, most public schools are not at the standards that they should be academically. They are very low right now. And public schools did not get bad overnight, and they are not going to get better overnight. So why not have the Opportunity Scholarship Program, which will give children in the District of Columbia an opportunity to get a high quality education, which they cannot receive right now at this point?

[Applause.]

Chairman LIEBERMAN. We have got to quiet down.

Senator BURRIS. Mr. Chairman, I still have 2 minutes of my time. I did not use all of my time, Mr. Chairman.

I want to ask this question. How many students are in the D.C. public schools?

Chairman LIEBERMAN. I am not sure I know the number—72,000?

Senator BURRIS. And how many students are in this program?

Chairman LIEBERMAN. It is between 1,600 and 2,000, depending on the year. I think it is about 1,700 now.

Senator BURRIS. And you say we have 74,000 students at a program for failure.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Well, obviously, there is some success. But, you know what, maybe we should save this for the second panel, although your answer was a good one, Ronald. But, to me, this program does not take a dollar from the D.C. public schools. As a matter of fact, it was part of an agreement that added millions of dollars to the public schools. And so it was all about creating options for parents and children while we are working our way to the day when the public schools can give the kind of education that all parents want their children to have.

But I think we will have more on this in the second panel. Senator Ensign.

#### OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR ENSIGN

Senator ENSIGN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks very much for holding this hearing. As a lot of folks know, I was the sponsor of the amendment to try to restore the funding for not only kids who are attending now but for kids into the future. And I think it is very unfortunate that the Secretary of Education has said that they are not going to allow new students into this program.

One of the reasons that I appreciate your being here today—especially, Tiffany, you have been through it. I think it is the respon-

sibility of people like you who understand the benefit of it to pay back so that other kids can have this benefit. And, Ronald, I loved your answer there.

By the way, I am a product of public schools. And, yes, I went to college. I went to veterinary school. I have a professional degree and all of that. And there are a lot of great public schools around the United States. There are, I am sure, some great public schools even within Washington, DC. There are some great teachers. There are some people who really care. But overall, Ronald, you are correct. The system in Washington, and in most other parts of the country, is not working. We are competing in a global marketplace today, and we have arguably the worst or second worst K through 12 system in the world today, and that is unacceptable.

For those who have argued that education is a civil right, to allow kids to be in failing schools—even if you are giving them an education, if it is a failing school, that is not providing a civil right. I believe in putting kids before special interest groups, and that is really what this is about.

There are many reforms out there. New York City has had some great articles recently. And, actually, the Secretary of Education came out and talked about the charter schools in New York City and the dramatic results that they have had in improving education. Those are public schools, but they are charter schools.

There is no one single answer for improving education. This is just one little piece that we are trying to preserve that has given 1,700 kids an opportunity to succeed, and there are some great examples. And, Ronald, I know when we did our press conference a month or two ago, I was very impressed with you and some of the other kids who were there that day. Seeing your faces, Tiffany, I am impressed with what you are accomplishing. And, Latasha, I am a parent, too. I have kids, and I want the best for them. As a matter of fact, I have a child who has special needs, and we actually found a private school for him.

Now, I am able to afford to send him to that school that meets his needs because they teach differently in the school. Now, we are fortunate that this school is going to become a charter school in a couple of years for other kids to be able to attend, and I am happy about that.

But there are just too many different situations out there, and the bottom line is, we need to have choices. And if choices and experiments can show that one thing is working, maybe the public schools will see that one thing that is working and copy it. It is called competition and experimentation so that we can improve all kids' education. Because if we want to send kids out into the world today to be able to compete against the Chinese and the Indians and the Europeans and the South Americans, they have to have a great education.

I would submit this. We have the finest colleges and educations in the world. Nobody argues that. Hands down, we are the best. So many people from around the world want to come to the United States.

Do you know the fundamental difference between K through 12 education and our colleges and universities? In our colleges and universities, if you have the GI Bill, if you get a student loan, if

you get a Pell grant, if you get a scholarship, you can go to any college you want to go to that you can get into. As a matter of fact, universities come, and they actually compete for the students. They recruit. So they are competing for those students. They are competing for those students and their money. If you do not have the means in K through 12, most people, it is a monopoly situation, are stuck there.

So what we are trying to do is provide some choices. That is why I like charter schools. That is why I like the ideas. Not to take away from the public school system, but to improve the public school system. We have great public colleges. We have not destroyed the public colleges in the United States by having competition; we have actually made them better. In Washington, DC, now, it costs \$15,500 per student, per year.

Ronald and Tiffany, do you know how much the voucher program is worth? The scholarship program that you are in, do you know how much you get?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Washington, DC, are you saying?

Senator ENSIGN. Yes.

Mr. HOLASSIE. Seven thousand five hundred dollars.

Senator ENSIGN. That is correct. So it is half.

By the way, every student is taken out, so D.C. public schools got more money, plus the fact that they do not have to educate the scholarship students. And you are getting half the price, and even though the study was not a great study, it certainly showed some positive results, and at least that is good. Positive results are good.

Now, if they actually did the study properly and just studied the kids that were in the program instead of studying the kids who did not get into the program—I mean, how do you group those two together? It just does not make any sense to me. But it still showed improvement, even with a flawed study. And that is the bottom line. We should be about improving kids' education.

So I thank all of you for being here and fighting for this. And we need to continue to fight together.

[Applause.]

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Thanks, Senator Ensign.

Friends, I have been a little light on the gavel here, but we are not accustomed to applause, usually, during Committee hearings. So if you can restrain yourself, please do.

Senator ENSIGN. Mr. Chairman, I am glad you said that after I got my applause. [Laughter.]

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Yes.

I want to thank this panel. You have been really compelling, and unfortunately, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has become an issue around which there is a great national debate. And in some sense, this panel reminds us that in the middle of this debate between different forces, there are real people—real parents who want the best for their children; real children with all the ability that God gave them, and they are just looking for the opportunity to develop it. And you have spoken with remarkable force and clarity and eloquence. I appreciate it very much.

Ms. Bennett, I admire you as a mother and know that your children will do well. And I hope that little daughter can get into this program.

Tiffany, did you say you are in a microbiology program?

Ms. DUNSTON. Biochemistry.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Biochemistry. So I am sure you are going to come back to the District either as a Ph.D. in something like that or a doctor and do great things.

Ronald, someday you are not just going to be deputy mayor.

So thank you for being here. God bless you. I will now call the second panel. Thank you very much. I know if I had not chastised everyone here, you would have received enormous applause at this point.

So we will call to the table Hon. Anthony A. Williams, former mayor of the District of Columbia; Bruce B. Stewart, Head of School of the Sidwell Friends School; and Patrick J. Wolf, Ph.D., principal investigator, Institute of Education Sciences Study, who comes to us from the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas.

We thank the three of you. We thank you for your patience. We are very eager to hear your testimony.

Mayor Williams, the truth is you need no introduction, but just let me say how much I admire your public service. And I have watched it since you were a student at Yale College and went into New Haven city government, and on from there. It has been remarkable to see all that you have done and all that you have accomplished. Your leadership on behalf of the children of the D.C. school system, not just on behalf of the institutions, but on behalf of each of the children, has really been a model for a lot of us. So we welcome your testimony now.

**TESTIMONY OF HON. ANTHONY A. WILLIAMS,<sup>1</sup> FORMER  
MAYOR OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

Mr. WILLIAMS. Well, good morning, Chairman Lieberman, Senator Collins, and Members of the Committee. I greatly appreciate your leadership on numerous issues of great importance to the District of Columbia, our Nation's capital, especially, I want to say, on voting rights. Although the journey is far from over, District residents are closer to achieving the full fruits of American democracy, civil rights, thanks to this Committee. And in that vein, I am pleased to be here to speak about another civil right, education, and in particular, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, which has expanded educational options for low-income students in Washington, DC.

I have often said that I would not be here today and would not have been mayor of the District of Columbia had it not been for loving parents that made sure I had the very best education possible. I am sure this is the case for Members of the Committee as well. Opportunity Scholarships, in fact, have improved the education of thousands of children from low-income families, one of whom may be a future mayor of our city as we saw with Ronald, or perhaps a congressperson, or maybe even a senator.

As many of you know, I was present at the creation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, and I want to say some people claim that it was forced on the city, or foisted on the city, by the

<sup>1</sup> The prepared statement of Mr. Williams appears in the Appendix on page 54.



evil Federal Government or Republican White House. This is not accurate, and I would like to set the record straight.

The program was shaped and championed by D.C. leaders, the same way the TAG program was that Senator Voinovich mentioned. The DC CAP program, the same thing here. In fact, yours truly, Kevin P. Chavous, then chair of the District Council's Education Committee, and then President of the D.C. Board of Education, Peggy Cooper Cafritz, and many local parents, educators and community leaders worked on the program. We worked closely with the previous Administration to develop what many refer to as a three-sector program.

So the three-sectors approach we talked about was not originally part of the design. Local leaders working with the Congress and working with the White House ensured that the public schools, the public charter schools, and the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship schools would all be funded.

Now, as one would expect, there was not unanimity among educational leaders on whether the District should have vouchers for private school education. Some would have, in fact, turned down support for public charter schools based solely on ideological opposition to voucher programs or choice. I have to say I listened to these sentiments, but I also listened closely, and I think more importantly, to the many low-income parents who implored me to put children first. And it became clear to me that there was no reason to deny these parents the opportunity to make the best choices for their children, the same choices that more affluent people make everyday, the same choices that parents make for college everyday.

Indeed, and unfortunately, there are still some who do not think that low-income parents should or are even capable of making these choices. And I profoundly disagreed and vowed that we offer the opportunity and see, indeed, whether parents would take advantage of the options, and they did in a very big way. And, in fact, I was impressed as mayor that mothers in the most desperate circumstances know intuitively and fundamentally what is important for their children, and we saw that here today.

Now, 5 years later, I am pleased that the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has been a big success. Over 2,600 students have used the scholarships, and there is high demand in the community with more than 8,000 families applying.

It was really important to me, and other original sponsors, including Senator Dianne Feinstein, that the original bill contained an evaluation component. And I would say, as part of the evaluation component, we were looking to see that there were actual metrics of success. And among the key findings we found so far are: Children have higher test scores; there is overwhelming parental satisfaction; parents are more involved in their child's education; students attend schools that are more integrated and have smaller class sizes; and finally, children have an improved attitude, and we saw this today, toward learning, toward their ambition, and toward their sense of self-esteem and their enthusiasm about the learning experience.

I would also say, as far as the evaluation of the program is concerned, the program was designed so that for the first time we would have a rigorous, however flawed, sustained evaluation of

choice in the Nation's capital. And I would agree with Senator Voinovich. I would say that at a very minimum, we allow the program to continue and evaluate it on its original terms before we stop it, undermine it, short circuit it, and claim it is a failure.

I am also pleased that the General Accounting Office (GAO) reviewed the management of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. A 2007 report highlighted a number of areas where administrative and management practices could, in fact, be improved. The program administrator, the Washington Scholarship Fund, has addressed these deficiencies, and the program has been, I think, improved materially. And I can tell you that having served as a mayor of a major American city that was subject to many GAO reports, the findings on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program were certainly within the margin of reasonable improvements. And overall, they demonstrated that the program has been administered successfully, I think, in the face of an overwhelming challenge of getting the program up and running in a very short period of time.

The bottom line is that a school choice environment is thriving in Washington, DC. There is a robust public charter school movement that is now educating over one-third of our students. And I applaud, as this Committee does, the work of my successor, Mayor Adrian Fenty, and our chancellor, Michelle Rhee, in giving unprecedented authority to the D.C. public school administration to act boldly, urgently, and aggressively. And I applaud them for their bold reform efforts and admire that kind of tenacity. Both of them, as we all know, are articulate supporters of school choice and recognize that every child benefits when parents have more than one option for a quality improved education choice.

I strongly urge the Committee to pass the reauthorization for the program. It is not enough to fund only the current children while not accepting new applications. That decision, in fact, as we have seen today, would split up families, could force the closure of some schools, and seems to be made more on the basis of political compromise rather than on the basis of real facts as they affect families.

It will be difficult to administer this program on a scale smaller than the current size, and participating schools will face higher per capita compliance burdens as the number of students dwindle. And quite frankly, I am somewhat befuddled by the proposal to have the program die by, in effect, attrition. As a lifelong Democrat who served 8 years as mayor of Washington, DC, with a predominantly African-American population beset by many challenges to the basic family structure and fabric, most importantly, a decades-long system of inferior education, I cannot understand why anyone would eliminate a program, especially when it is not costing the schools or the local District government a dime, that has uplifted the lives, fulfilled the dreams, and given hope to thousands of low-income families.

Now, I am not here to advocate for national policies or to speak beyond the needs of the city I served as mayor. I am here to say that given the unique—let us say peculiar—relationship between the Federal Government and its capital city, the three-sector program, including the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, is an

appropriate and well-deserved and, I think, productive Federal investment.

Last week, I had the opportunity and was very proud to speak at a rally in support of choice in the District. Over 2,000 parents, children, and members of the community came together outside our city hall. These families presented to the mayor and to the District leadership a petition.

Mr. Chairman, you have shown the package—7,400 signatures, all D.C. residents, who not only support the program but want it reauthorized and, in fact, expanded and strengthened. What better measure of success than the desire of parents, the desire of citizens, citizens of the District, to continue the program? And you have heard from a couple of them today, and I think their testimony has been profound.

I have to tell you, far beyond any building—and my wife gets sick of me driving around the city saying I helped build this and I helped build that—I think my real sense of pride is to say that I had some small role to create a program where Ronald and Tiffany could sit here today and talk to you about their successful dreams and ambitions. We need to continue that, we need to support that, and we need to reauthorize this program. And I thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Thanks, Mr. Williams. That was very powerful. Thanks for what you did when you were mayor, and thanks for sticking with it after.

We are very grateful, Bruce Stewart, that you are here. Bruce Stewart is the Head of Sidwell Friends School, a great private school here in Washington, really, probably one of the best in the country, which has taken students under the OSP program. And we look forward to hearing your experience with that now. Thank you.

#### **TESTIMONY OF BRUCE B. STEWART,<sup>1</sup> HEAD OF SCHOOL, SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL**

Mr. STEWART. Thank you and good morning. I am delighted to be here today to speak about this critically important issue. I want to apologize in advance, though, for my hoarseness. I hope you can indulge that.

School choice, I believe, is as fundamentally American as apple pie, and D.C.'s experimental Opportunity Scholarship Program is a significant means of providing District families with a whole new awareness regarding the best options for their children's academic growth. Indeed, this initiative has prompted scores of historically underserved people to think even more carefully, thoughtfully, and critically about the education of their daughters and sons. And I use that sequence because I have three daughters.

How Americans cultivate human capacity will undoubtedly shape our national economic viability. As McKinsey and Company has so aptly noted in its very recent research efforts, the racial, economic, and regional gaps in education across our country "impose on the United States the economic equivalent of a permanent national recession." That is, I believe, a powerful observation.

<sup>1</sup> The prepared statement of Mr. Stewart appears in the Appendix on page 59.

Hence, I think that we, and each of you in particular, must do all that can be done to sustain D.C. Opportunity Scholarships for the young people of the District. I think we would all agree that choice and competition are fundamental threads in our country's fabric. We have, I believe, a strong national conviction regarding alternatives. Is it not far more American to select from options and opportunity ranges in the marketplace, in health care, in vocation, in religion, in location of our homes, in the election of our public officials, and in a host of other key value decisions, than to select from a few heavily restricted options or a single forced choice?

For me, involvement with the OSP has brought my own early public school experience vividly back to life. As one who grew up in a largely immigrant community in Lynn, Massachusetts, I hold clear recollections of family and neighbors deeply concerned about the community's schools and the opportunities they did or did not present for their children. Hence, throughout my career as an academic administrator, I have maintained the strong conviction that every child should have the option to attend a school of appropriate academic fit regardless of place of residence.

In my time, public, parochial, independent, vocational, and boarding schools were all options. Choice was often the product of particular personal or family beliefs, but academic rigor and preparation for vocational and college study were also almost always distinctly top-tier considerations.

It is good to see these mind-sets returning to the forefront in D.C. and to know that families are once again engaging in a reflective discussion about their children's school placement. I think there is little question that society benefits immensely when opportunities are offered to all, not simply to some.

Let me offer a personal observation from my own career journey. My first full-time teaching assignment was in public education in Greensboro, North Carolina, just after the sit-ins at the now historical Woolworth lunch counter. As a teacher and ninth grade guidance counselor, a very important part of my work my very first year of my career was with a dozen or so young black Americans who were the first of their race to enter Walter Hines Page High School. They were given choice, but that opportunity required unparalleled courage and conviction and led them through great personal pain and sacrifice simply to enjoy equal access.

That experience immediately inspired in me a strong determination to do all that I could to see that every young American, regardless of background, received a fair chance at the best education possible. It is still my hope that this goal will one day be fully met, and not as a matter of random occurrence, but rather through carefully reasoned public policy.

School integration by race has made a true difference, and I believe that greater school mixture by economic standing is similarly essential. We must not allow one racial or socio-economic tier of our society to flourish while others languish. The one and the many are, and must continue to be, inextricably intertwined if we are to achieve the full potential so powerfully present in our ever-maturing democracy. For justice's sake, we cannot have the connected rife with choice while the disenfranchised remain captured by circumstance.

Over the past 50 years, I have personally experienced the maturation of our society's growing commitment to racial equality. After Page High School, I had the wonderful opportunity to work first with Governor Terry Sanford as one of the founders of the North Carolina School of the Arts and then with Governor Jim Hunt as a consultant to the development of the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics. For 14 years, I served in the administration of Guilford College as Director of Admissions, Assistant to the President, Provost and Acting President; then I became Head of Abington Friends School, and now I serve as Head of School at the Sidwell Friends School. In all of these institutions, I have thankfully had numerous opportunities to advocate for social justice.

In each case, one of my professional priorities was increasing student access, not only in terms of race but also in relation to economic background. It made no sense to me, as the son of a Scottish immigrant who attended school only through the third grade, not to do all in my power to make certain that every child could gain access to the school of his or her choice.

My father's words always echoed in my ears, "Boy, I crossed the great pond, the Atlantic, to give you learning opportunities that I could never enjoy. Do not ever make excuses. Achieve! Be all that you can be." That was his dream for me. And for nearly 50 years, that has been my dream as an educator for every American child; no exceptions!

I am very proud of the fact that today, Sidwell Friends School (SFS) enrolls a truly diverse community of students. Currently, we serve two students who have qualified for OSP grants and three who are Signature Scholarship recipients, both programs being administered by the Washington Scholarship Fund. Each of these young people has prospered, having worked determinedly to take full advantage of the school's varied and rigorous curricular and co-curricular programs. Sidwell Friends School is honored to be the school of their choice. Clearly, all of these youngsters, and many more enrolled at other independent and non-public schools across the District, reached, and reached high, for a challenging education.

When the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program was originally announced, there were many members of the independent school community who were qualified in their endorsement of it, fearing government interference. Sidwell Friends School, however, felt that young boys and girls should not be trapped in a school ineffective for them and their needs and abilities simply by the quirk of birthplace, race, income, or current home address. Therefore, I am happy to say that SFS was the first such institution to step forward to participate in the OSP, and without any measure of reservation. We believed that a new set of applicants from modest economic circumstances would be motivated to consider independent and other educational options because they would now have the support, financial and otherwise, to do so.

As a result, Sidwell Friends School would be able to educate and benefit additional deserving young people. And while we felt we could proffer great service to them, there was no doubt in our minds that they in turn—and I want to emphasize this point—

would significantly enrich our school community by bringing an invaluable perspective into our classrooms.

As Neil Rudenstine, former President of Harvard University, so aptly observed, what an academic value it is to have "every face present and every voice heard" in the classrooms of our Nation. There was no way, he believed, of achieving the academic excellence we all seek without that crucial variety. Yes, access is morally appropriate, but diversity is also absolutely fundamental to learning at the highest level.

I think of my own teaching of high school economics. What kind of classroom would one have and what sort of discourse could one prompt in a discussion, for example, of national housing policy if nearly everyone present is either from the comfort of affluence or the challenge of poverty? Good exploration of any concept requires multiple voices and varied perspectives and not narrowly synonymous thought. For authentic excellence in education, we desperately need to ensure that there is a true mixture of diversity and complexity of perspective in all of our academic dialogues.

The Opportunity Scholarship Program is the beginning of the opening up of the genuine possibility for all American students to know and experience one another. What could be better for the goal of ending the polarity of red and blue in America, which I know you desire, than the creation of a Nation of citizens who respect and understand the perspectives held by people of different backgrounds and viewpoints?

Our collective essence as Americans has always been the source of our truest strength. Please do not allow this important step toward pluralism that OSP represents to recede. Keep the windows you have opened open and unlock even more. Go forward and not backward. Enlarge our national vision, do not narrow it!

Horace Mann, from my home State of Massachusetts, who was an early and distinguished national leader of public education in America, called on us "to be ashamed to die until we have achieved some great victory for humanity." I strongly implore you to make certain that the positive steps already taken with OSP do not slip quietly away by virtue of inaction. Ensuring the opening of our educational system so that all are served and served well cannot be left to a matter of chance. Rather, it must be brought to a condition of certainty. Continuance of the Opportunity Scholarship Program, in my judgment, is one very powerful step in that needed direction. Thank you so very much.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Stewart. That was excellent. You make a point that we miss at our peril, which is that this program is not only good for the students who get to make the choice with their parents of where they want to go, it is good for the schools and the other students at the schools to which they go. I appreciate that.

Dr. Wolf, thanks for being here. Thanks for coming up from Arkansas. Thanks for the work that you have done. Dr. Wolf is the principal investigator for the evaluation commission by the Department of Education. We look forward to your testimony now.

**STATEMENT OF PATRICK J. WOLF, PH.D.,<sup>1</sup> PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR, INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES STUDY, COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS, UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS**

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Chairman, Senator Collins, Members of the Committee, we interrupt this long string of inspiring stories from students, parents, and educational leaders for 10 minutes of droning from a researcher. [Laughter.]

Seriously, I am pleased to be with you today to discuss the results of the three-year impact evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, or OSP for short. I am the principal investigator of an outstanding team of researchers conducting that congressionally mandated study, supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. I am also a professor of education policy at the University of Arkansas, with more than a decade of experience evaluating school-choice programs in the District of Columbia and across the Nation.

Although the facts that I present to you today are taken directly from the impact evaluation, the ideas and opinions that I express are mine alone and do not necessarily represent any official positions of the evaluation team, the University of Arkansas, the Institute of Education Sciences, or the U.S. Department of Education.

Our evaluation of the OSP is the largest school voucher study in the United States to use random assignment, the gold standard of program evaluation. Two cohorts, totaling 2,308 students that applied to the program in 2004 and 2005, represent the impact sample that we are following for purposes of this study. A total of 1,387 students in the study won the scholarship lottery and were, thereby, assigned to the treatment group, while the remaining 921 students who did not win the lottery were assigned to the control group.

Evidence from the study confirms that the OSP serves an historically disadvantaged group of D.C. students. Over 90 percent of students are African American and 9 percent are Hispanic. Their family incomes averaged less than \$20,000 in the baseline year in which they applied to the program. On average, participating students were performing around the 33rd national percentile in reading and math at baseline. Forty-four percent of students in the impact sample were attending public schools designated as schools in need of improvement (SINI) between 2003 and 2005.

The Opportunity Scholarship Program offers students vouchers but cannot guarantee their subsequent enrollment in a private school. Moreover, no one can stop members of the control group from attending a private school outside of the program. Adding public charter schools to the mix, we see in Figure 1,<sup>2</sup> distributed to the Committee, that members of both the treatment and control groups attended all three types of schools—private, public charter, and traditional public—in year 3 of the voucher experiment, though the proportions that attended each type differed significantly based on whether or not they won the scholarship lottery.

<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Mr. Wolf with attached charts appears in the Appendix on page 66.

<sup>2</sup>The chart referenced by Mr. Wolf appears in the Appendix on page 77.

Among the treatment group, 72 percent of the students who provided outcome data in year 3 were attending private schools, 9 percent were in public charter schools, and 19 percent were in traditional public schools. For the control group, 12 percent were in private schools, 34 percent in charter schools, and 54 percent in traditional public schools.

I see these data as underscoring that the desire to exercise school choice was strong for the families who applied to the OSP in 2004 and 2005. About 81 percent of them placed their child in a private or public school of choice 3 years after winning the scholarship lottery, and 46 percent of them did likewise even if they lost the lottery. This also means that any differences between the outcomes of the treatment and control groups indicate the incremental impact of adding private school choice through the OSP to the existing schooling options for low-income D.C. families.

In our reports, we provide three different estimates of this program effect. The impact of the offer of treatment simply subtracts the control group outcomes from the treatment group outcomes, regardless of the type of school the members of each group attended. The difference is the experimental impact of the scholarship offer.

We also estimate the impact of actually using a scholarship compared to being in the control group. We do so by adjusting the experimental impact to account for students who never used their scholarship and, therefore, could not have been affected by it.

Finally, we use a statistical procedure called Instrumental Variable Analysis to estimate the effect of attending a private school compared to attending a public school.

All three effect estimates are provided in my written testimony and in our impact report. For the remainder of this testimony, whenever possible, I will highlight the impacts of using an Opportunity Scholarship because that impact is informative, intuitive, and widely accepted in the research community.

Our analysis of the data after 3 years of participation in the OSP revealed that the program had a statistically significant positive impact at the 95 percent confidence level on the test scores of students in reading. The positive impact of the voucher program on student reading scores after 3 years amounted to an average gain of 5.3 scale score points from scholarship use. We know from this study that participating D.C. students are reading at higher levels as a result of the Opportunity Scholarship Program. No statistically significant impacts were observed in math.

The more conservative pure experimental impacts of the scholarship offer were measured consistently across all 3 years of our impact evaluation. When we examined them over time, as in Figure 2,<sup>1</sup> the data appear to show a trend toward larger reading gains cumulating for students in the program. Especially when one considers that school choice requires adjusting to a new and different school environment in the short run, the experimental reading impacts of 1 scale score point but not significant in the first year, 3.2 scale score points but not significant in the second year, and 4.5 scale score points and significant in the third year suggest that students are consistently gaining in reading performance relative to

<sup>1</sup> The chart referenced by Mr. Wolf appears in the Appendix on page 78.



their control group peers the longer they experience the OSP. No such trend is apparent regarding math achievement.

When examined as separate subgroups, five types of students experienced significant reading impacts after 3 years as a result of using an Opportunity Scholarship. Students who were not attending schools in need of improvement prior to entering the program gained an average of 7.7 scale score points from using a scholarship. Students in the higher two-thirds of the performance distribution, whose average reading test score was at the 37th national percentile at baseline, gained 6.2 points. Students entering grades K–8 at baseline gained 6 points. Female students gained 5.9 points. And the students in Cohort 1, the eager “first movers” into the program, such as Tiffany and Ronald, gained 11.7 scale score points in reading from participating in the OSP. Since the initial results for these last two subgroups lost significance when subject to a reliability test, I would just caution that they be interpreted carefully.

Reading impacts for the other five subgroups examined individually—applicants from schools in need of improvement, students in the lower one-third of the performance distribution at baseline, males, students entering high school at baseline, and students in Cohort 2—were not statistically significant after 3 years.

The fact that significant reading impacts were not observed for the subgroup of SINI students is noteworthy since Congress designated them as the highest service priority for the program. Math impacts were not statistically significant for any of the 10 subgroups examined.

Whenever school choice researchers have asked about satisfaction with schools, parents who are given the chance to select their child’s school have reported much higher levels of satisfaction. Students themselves, for whatever reasons, have rarely described themselves, on average, as more satisfied with the new schools chosen by their parents.

The year 3 satisfaction results from the OSP evaluation fit this pattern of previous studies. The proportion of parents who assigned a high grade of A or B to their child’s school in year 3 was 12 percentile points higher if their child used a scholarship. Parents also were significantly more confident of the safety of their children in school if they had been awarded an Opportunity Scholarship. Students in grades 4 through 12, when asked similar questions, were no more likely to be satisfied with their school or describe it as safe if they used a scholarship compared to the control group.

What does this pattern of results suggest about the effectiveness of the OSP? As you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, the National Center for Educational Evaluation at the Institute of Education Sciences has released the results of 11 studies. As you mentioned, only 3 of those 11 show statistically significant gains in achievement like those we discovered through the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program evaluation.

Several of the no-impact education programs have only been evaluated for 1 or 2 years and could show significant achievement impacts in subsequent reports. But the larger point is that many Federal education programs and State and local education programs targeted at disadvantaged students are now the subjects of rigorous evaluation. Most of these programs have yet to dem-

onstrate the ability to move disadvantaged students to significantly higher levels of academic achievement. In my opinion, by demonstrating statistically significant impacts overall in reading in an experimental evaluation, the D.C. OSP has met a tough standard for efficacy in serving low-income, inner-city students.

How large are the statistically significant reading gains observed in the OSP overall? The magnitude of the gains may lie in the eyes of the beholder. One constructive way to view achievement gains, however, is in terms of additional months of instruction.

The overall gains from the OSP observed after 3 years mean that members of the control group, who represent what scholarship students would have experienced absent the program, would need to remain in school an extra 3.7 months on average to catch up to the level of reading achievement obtained by scholarship users. If you were to ask a group of low-income, inner-city parents if they would enroll their child in an education program that has demonstrated the ability to produce more than 3½ months of reading achievement gains, I suspect that most of them would say yes.

The current rigorous evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has revealed much about the effects of voucher programs on participating students; however, more could be learned from the OSP, either through new data collection or even new analyses of what we have already obtained. The most important questions that remain include: First, what are the impacts of the program after 4 or 5 years of participation?

The research team is collecting additional follow-up data from the students in the study. Analysis of those data will indicate if the reading impacts observed for the OSP students after 3 years grow, plateau, or fade, and will be an important topic of our final evaluation report planned for next spring.

Second, does the OSP improve high school graduation and college enrollment rates? This was a point raised by Senator Voinovich and Tiffany in her testimony. Well, unlike many other scholarship programs, the OSP enrolled older students beyond grade 6. A modest number of these students are now old enough to be included in an analysis of the program's impact on high school graduation and college enrollment rates.

Third, how do participating private schools differ from the public schools students would have attended? This was a question that was raised in the previous panel.

The current evaluation is not the first rigorous study to find academic benefits for students who use vouchers, but none has been able to determine empirically why or how these impacts happen. We surveyed parents, students, and public and private school principals about various school characteristics, but have only begun to examine how these data relate to student voucher gains.

Fourth, who participates in the OSP and who drops out? We could use the current evaluation data to explore what types of students initially applied to the program, how and why students moved in and out of scholarship use, and what program supports might encourage greater persistence in the program.

Finally, does the OSP have any effect on racial integration in schools? Using the current evaluation data, we could examine if the

students who participate in such programs end up better integrating both the schools they choose and the schools they leave.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Thanks, Dr. Wolf. I agree it was less inspiring, but it was very important, and I thank you for that.

We will do 7-minute question rounds.

Let me just ask you first, Dr. Wolf, am I right to understand that the report you have given, which you issued last month, was based on the first 3 years of the program?

Mr. WOLF. That is correct, Mr. Chairman. The program was not fully implemented until 2005, so we waited for those two cohorts to be enrolled and then studied them, each 3 years out.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. So this in a sense was an interim report. You are still under contract with the Department of Education to complete the 2 additional years. And that is the report you refer to that is expected in the spring of 2010.

Mr. WOLF. Yes. Mr. Chairman, it will be one additional year, again, because we had 2 baseline years, and we will have 4 outcome years.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Right.

So, to me, that in itself, unless what I call your interim 3-year report showed terrible results, just on a rational basis, the fact that you are considering another year is reason not to terminate the program because, basically, it is calling it off before we have a complete report, and the partial report we have is encouraging.

Let me go from that to understand.

You use the term “statistically significant.” Just give us, as best you can, a layperson’s understanding of what that means. Because as I look at this, there are advances—and these are the reading scores—but it did not get to be statistically significant until you got to year 3.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. WOLF. Sure, Mr. Chairman.

When you compare different groups of students, which is essentially what we do in any analysis, we compare averages for the different groups, inevitably, a group is going to be somewhat different from another group. But many times those differences are small and are based on statistical sampling and imprecise data, and so, they cannot be embraced with any confidence.

If you find, in effect, a difference that is statistically significant, what that says is it has passed a confidence threshold, where we can say this is not just noise or random variation; this is a true difference.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. So just going over to the math side, the blue lines suggest, therefore, not that the students you are assessing regressed. In fact, it appears from these lines, you correct me if I am wrong, that they made progress in math, but it did not reach a statistically significant level. Is that correct?

Mr. WOLF. The average score for the voucher students in math is higher than the average score for the control group students in math, and it has been each year. But it is not so much different that we would attach statistical significance to it.

<sup>1</sup> The chart referenced by Chairman Lieberman appears in the Appendix on page 78.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. But I think that is important as people try to dismiss the results and say, oh, the students who were part of the OSP program just did better in reading. Well, of course, reading is critically important; it was half of what you studied. But they also did better than the students who were not part of the OSP program in math. They just did not do better up to a statistically significant level.

I am also struck by the comparison, the 11 other programs that you studied, and only three of those, including this one, had statistically significant improvements.

Just give us a quick description, but you do not have to give names if you do not want to, of what other kinds of programs you studied that were not statistically significant.

Mr. WOLF. Certainly, Mr. Chairman. Some of them were teacher training and induction programs.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Right.

Mr. WOLF. Professional development programs.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. These were all over the country, I take it.

Mr. WOLF. Yes. These are various experimental programs around the country in which this rigorous model of experimental evaluation was applied. Some were specialized curriculum programs that they were piloting and evaluating. One was a student-to-student mentoring program that showed no statistically significant effects. So a variety of education interventions were among that group that did not show significant gains.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. And it is in that context, with that background, that you made the statement, "The D.C. OSP has met a tough standard for efficacy in serving low-income, inner-city students." So of the various programs you have looked at nationally, you would say that the D.C. OSP is one of the most effective and, therefore, most encouraging.

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Chairman, from what I have examined, that would be a correct characterization.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Let me just ask you one final question and see if I can do this quickly.

The treatment group, the group that you studied in the OSP program, includes students who were offered the voucher but never used it to attend private school. And the control group, the students who applied for vouchers but were not offered one, includes some students who nonetheless went to private or charter schools without the OSP voucher. They found some other way to go.

Do I understand your study correctly to say that if you take into consideration both the students in the treatment group, the OSP group, that did not use the voucher and the students in the control group that went to private school with other resources, in fact, we see about a 5-month achievement gain? Is that correct?

Mr. WOLF. Yes, Mr. Chairman, that is correct. And that is in the second comparison that you described, which accounts for scholarship non-users in the treatment group and private school attenders in the control group. That is contained in Appendix H of our report, and your characterization is accurate.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Thanks.

One question for you, Mr. Stewart, in the time I have left.

I know some critics of this program argue that schools like Sidwell Friends School have the resources to fund students like those in the OSP program without a government-funded program. And I want to ask you whether, as the head of the school at Sidwell Friends School, you believe that the Opportunity Scholarship Program has in fact allowed you to admit students you otherwise would not admit and, therefore, to expand the diversity of your student body as you described that goal.

Mr. STEWART. Absolutely. It is an expansion of the outreach that we can do because when we receive that \$7,500 per child, for every three children we take, we can fund a fourth.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Excellent. My time is up. Senator Collins. Senator COLLINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Wolf, I, too, want to explore the findings of your study in a little more depth. First, based on what I have read and what you have testified, it took 3 years before statistically significant gains were measured in reading.

Do you believe that this finding reflects a need for a longer duration of the program before you start to see those gains or is it due to the fact that you may have had older students in the program rather than younger students, where gains in reading might be more significant? In other words, does it seem to be due to the demographics of the student population as this program is getting underway or does it tell us that the longer students are in this program, the more successful they are going to be?

Mr. WOLF. Senator Collins, I think it is your second statement, your last statement there. I do not think the demographics, the fact that these students are moving to higher grades, explains why the statistically significant reading gains emerged in the third year. I think it is the logic of the intervention, of the school choice policy, which requires students to switch schools to initiate the process and adjust to a new environment.

As Bruce Stewart explained, and some of the students explained, there can be a radically different environment of expectations and behaviors in their new school environment that they need to adjust to. There is a lot of reliable research suggesting that every time a student switches a school, they fall back somewhat in achievement. And so, here we have an education intervention that starts with a school switch and probably starts with a step back for most students. And so, it is likely to take more time for significant achievement gains to emerge under those circumstances.

Senator COLLINS. Which is another reason for continuing the program to assess its impact because you are going to have that adjustment year, as you pointed out. And then once that adjustment time is over, it seems you start to see the gains.

I do want to talk to you more about the difference between the reading scores and the math scores. Senator Lieberman brought out a very important point, which has been lost in some of the coverage of your report, that there were gains in math, but because they are not statistically significant at this point, we are not quite sure how to evaluate them.

But beyond that, do you see a reason for the disparity in the gains in reading versus math?

Mr. WOLF. Senator Collins, that is an excellent question, and at this point, I cannot give you a good answer to that question. There are many possibilities. Effective reading skills and reading instruction has been a very prominent topic in education circles in the last 5 or 6 years. And it may be that many of these private schools in the District taking in voucher students have focused on adopting a particularly effective approach to teaching reading. And so, there may have been more of an emphasis in reading instruction in the schools these students are attending relative to math instruction.

That is one possibility. I do not have any firm evidence. We are surveying the schools about those sorts of matters in hopes of trying to discover if that is one of the elements. It may just be that their overall course of instruction is somewhat more effective, and we are just seeing the gains sooner in reading than in math, but I can only speculate on those things at this point.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you.

Mr. Williams, I would be remiss—and Senator Lieberman pointed out your Connecticut connection—if I did not inform everyone of your connections to the great State of Maine, since I recall the first time we met that you told me of going to Maine as a child. And I am sure that has been responsible for your future success. [Laughter.]

So it was not just Yale, Mr. Chairman, that did that.

Mr. Williams, you raised a really important point, and I remember very well the negotiations over the three-sector approach. Your point—and this is a very important point that we cannot forget—is that the agreement resulted in more money for D.C.'s public schools, for the traditional schools, and for the public charter schools, as well as for the D.C. Opportunity Scholarships. That is a critical point because a lot of the opponents of this program keep putting forth the false assertion that it is somehow robbing the public schools, and that is just not true.

I have opposed many voucher programs because they did take money from public schools, but that is not the case here. You negotiated very well and were able to get new Federal funding for D.C.'s traditional public schools, for D.C.'s charter schools, and for the Opportunity Scholarship Program. And I think we cannot let that point go unremarked upon because it is absolutely critical.

We want all of the District's children to succeed, every single one of them. But I do think that Ronald put it very well when he said that D.C. schools did not get bad overnight; they are not going to get well overnight. That was the best statement that he could have made.

I would be very interested in your assessment of community support as a former mayor, as a D.C. citizen, back when you first started this program 5 years ago versus today. How would you evaluate the community support for continuing this program?

Mr. WILLIAMS. Well, I would start out by saying that the great transportation secretary and congressman Norm Mineta said that his best job was mayor of San Jose. And he tells this story about when he was in the mayor's office, a lady came in the mayor's office and said, "I want to speak to somebody, and I do not want to speak to anybody lower than the mayor." And he came out and he said, "Ma'am, there is no one lower than the mayor." [Laughter.]

So when you are the mayor, you really are right there on the griddle, and you kind of really know what people are saying. Everybody said, well, when you support the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, you are going to be run out of town.

I think that people in the District at the community level understood, one, that parents are working very hard, as I said earlier, under desperate conditions, to do the best by their child. Why not allow these mothers to do so? Especially when you are bringing in additional Federal money to help the charter schools and to help the public schools, especially when, if this program ended, it actually would be, as Senator Ensign indicated, a net impact not only on the public charter schools, but a double whammy on the public schools. And finally, especially when I think there was an understanding in the community that during my time as mayor, and Mayor Fenty has continued this, we put easily over 50 percent more into our school system in terms of funding.

So this was not robbing Peter to pay Paul, as you say very well. This was about expanding choices for all the parents in all the different settings. And as the Chairman has said, not only benefiting the students but benefiting the schools as well.

In our American democracy, when you can get 2,000 parents to come out on a not-so-beautiful work day to Freedom Plaza and demonstrate for this and generate 7,400 signatures, I think that says a lot.

Senator COLLINS. It does indeed. I am going to have to leave at this point, but I wanted to thank all of the members of this panel and the previous panel. I have to say that I do not know how anyone who looks at the evidence and hears the testimony we have heard today could vote otherwise than to extend this important program. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Thank you very much, Senator Collins. Senator Voinovich.

Senator VOINOVICH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Wolf, you have done a lot of evaluations of these programs all over the country.

Have you done anything in the Cleveland area?

Mr. WOLF. Senator Voinovich, I have not personally been involved in an evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program. I was involved in the evaluation of a voucher type Children's Scholarship Fund program in Dayton, Ohio, that showed significant achievement gains after 2 years for the students there in Dayton.

Senator VOINOVICH. Well, this program has been in effect since 1996, and now it is just accepted. And we have between 5,500 and 6,000 students that are participating in the program. And from everything I understand, it has just been very good. I mean, it is not spectacular, but in terms of comparing where these kids would be if they were not in this particular environment, they are just doing a whole lot better; dropout rate down, college attendance up.

Senator Collins was talking about the math issue; there does not seem to be any improvement there.

Have you looked at other places that have had a program, and have you seen where you have had improvement in both math and reading at the same time?

Mr. Stewart, you might be able to comment on that. Why is there this discrepancy? Is it because maybe the teachers are not up to speed in terms of math? In other words, have you seen other programs around the country where you have seen the reading go up and the math scores also improve?

Mr. STEWART. I think one of the most difficult issues we all face, as the data now suggests, is that in public schools most of the teaching faculty are coming from the bottom third, in terms of ranking of colleges and universities, and from the bottom third of their graduating classes. And many faculty are not trained well, and you will find very few schools who have people teaching mathematics who have a degree in mathematics. And that makes a significant difference in their capacity, I think, to instruct in the field.

They may be able to do, in some manner, the mathematics at the level they are teaching, but they often have no sense of vision about where that ultimately needs to take students. I think it is much easier to find effective teachers in the humanities than it is in science and mathematics. Part of that is because we compete in an economy that greatly rewards those skills, and it appears it is going to increasingly reward them even at a greater level.

My last comment would be that many of the phenomenal faculty that I started teaching with 50 years ago were women and persons of color because that was about the one professional place where most of them could work. And, today, all those people are now on the Supreme Court or in the Senate or doing other incredibly good things, which is just what they ought to be doing. But it has been at the expense of the quality of the person in the classroom in America's public schools, and that is a "luxury" we can not afford to see sustained. This country desperately needs its Hispanic and black young people, and certainly disadvantaged white young people, to get a better level of quality of education. And that means improving the quality of teaching.

Safety in schools is a serious issue. We had the senator asking this morning about this program. Thirty-six young people in Chicago's school system, in this morning's paper, have been killed in this school year. That is not a safe environment. It is not a safe city. It is not a safe circumstance. We have to give much more careful attention to that issue.

Mr. WOLF. Senator Voinovich, in the early days of the Milwaukee Voucher Program, which now enrolls 20,000 students, when it was a pilot program like the D.C. OSP, there were two experimental evaluations of the impacts of that voucher program. They both concluded there were clear gains in math from the program. One of the evaluations suggested that there were gains in reading as well, but the math gains were larger. The other evaluation only found impacts in math.

Actually, that second evaluation was conducted by Cecilia Rouse, who is now on President Obama's Council of Economic Advisors. So she is one of the researchers who has conducted rigorous evaluations of school voucher programs and found achievement gains from those programs.

Senator VOINOVICH. Well, it would be interesting to me to look at the quality of the education of people that are in the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program schools, where the kids were taking



advantage of the scholarships, versus the educational background in the sciences of teachers in the regular public school system. That may be the answer, that there are not that many qualified math and science teachers, as you point out, that are around.

One thing that we are doing, which I think is really good, is when the Rising Above the Gathering Storm report was issued, the National Science Foundation came out and basically said that we needed to do more in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) school area. And I think the District is taking that on, and that is happening all over the country. I mean, it is just amazing.

We have a STEM school in Cleveland, and these kids are unbelievable. If they have the opportunity, they can shine. They can be stars. And right now, this little program is giving an opportunity for kids to shine and be stars, and to feel good about themselves and have a future. And why would you want to snuff out that light that is out there right now, particularly when we are trying to bring everybody along in the process?

I think it is really important that people understand that we want the public school system to improve, and everybody is concerned about it. But I have to tell you, things were so bad in the Cleveland system that I was able to convince the legislature to go along with the scholarship program, and it was the only district that let us do it. The unions were opposed; the high school boards were opposed. And finally I said to the legislators, look, Cleveland is so bad that we have to try something else to see if we cannot make a difference. And that is when they allowed us to go forward with a program. And, by golly, it really has made a difference in the lives of those people that have participated in it.

I hope the same thing for the other children in the public school system. We have a great superintendent right now. You have a great superintendent right here. But as we move along, let us not snuff out these opportunities that are out there for kids to really be somebody.

Mr. STEWART. And she is a strong advocate for choice.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Thanks, Senator Voinovich. Thanks for all you have done in this regard along the way. And, you are right, this does come down to individual lives and their ability to realize their God-given potential.

Senator Akaka.

#### OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR AKAKA

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to be part of this discussion. I want to speak about the District of Columbia private school voucher program and opportunities for educating the District's children. And my interest is that while in Hawaii, I was associated with the education program there, and of course, I support public education and the using and acquiring of sufficient funds for public schools.

The District of Columbia public school system, as we know, has had a long history of failing its students and its community. And as a result of that, Mayor Williams, as was pointed out, and others introduced different programs. OSP came forward because of that failure and trying to improve the education of students in the Dis-

trict of Columbia. Mayor Fenty and Chancellor Rhee continue to do, I feel, a remarkable job in addressing those failures. But it is a long road, and we are on that road together.

For me, a strong public education system is a cornerstone of a healthy and prosperous society. And it is our job to help the District provide that education to all of the District's students. I do want to note that I am very concerned about the students enrolled in this program and do not believe there should be something that forces them out of their school system at the present time.

Mayor Williams, of the students who were eligible for scholarships, only 41 percent of those students used their scholarships consistently over the entire 3 years, and 25 percent never used their scholarships.

Some of the reasons that were cited were lack of available space in the private school, the private school did not offer programs for students with special needs, and lack of academic support for the child. You do advocate expansion of the voucher program.

What resources do you believe should be provided to ensure that all students who want to participate in the program can participate?

Mr. WILLIAMS. Senator, I would say first in response to the number of students who participate over time, when you look at the study in terms of parental satisfaction, it is very high. If you look at the number of spots that are available versus the number of applications, it shows a great demand for the program.

I would say that at a minimum, we would like to see the program continued on the basis it was originally established. In other words, it was set for a certain period. I think there is another year or 2 years left. There would be a formal evaluation, and then on the basis of that evaluation, the Congress would act. And I think we ought to continue on that basis.

I would certainly argue that it ought to be expanded. I would say that some of the indicia that you have indicated argue for actually expanding the program to support the schools. So in other words, to say the program does not work because the schools do not have enough money to satisfy all the students, this argues, I think, for additional funding, which I would certainly argue for here in front of you.

But being realistic and practical, I would say what we are looking for here is just to continue the program on its original basis; do an evaluation. And we are confident that when you look at the merits, looking at real statistics and other indicia and other metrics, the program will be sustained.

Senator AKAKA. Mr. Wolf, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) evaluation found that 25 percent of students who were offered a scholarship never used it and 19 percent of students who did not use the scholarships went to a public charter school instead.

In your evaluation, were parents of students asked if they preferred public schools, private schools, or public charter schools? And if so, can you tell us why?

Mr. WOLF. Senator Akaka, we are only following the families who applied for the program, and so they were all seeking an Opportunity Scholarship when they enrolled in the study. Those who

declined to use their scholarship and went to charter schools and made other educational decisions, we still follow them in the study. We survey them and ask them, for example, why did you choose this school as opposed to using an Opportunity Scholarship, and they give the variety of responses that you mentioned. In some cases, families may have just found a public charter school that they feel better meets the educational needs of their child than what was available in the Opportunity Scholarship Program, and that is why they declined to use their scholarship.

Senator AKAKA. Mr. Stewart, Sidwell Friends School is an excellent place of learning, and I imagine, many parents would like their children to go there. There are approximately 1,700 students in the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program.

How many students from the OSP program have applied to your school and how many students has your school accepted?

Mr. STEWART. We have accepted, I think, over the course of the program, five students, and we have accepted all that have applied. But they have been directed to us according to their background and preparation by the Washington Scholarship Fund, so we could have confidence that they were prepared. All they needed was terrific support, and they got it. However, I do not think it ever serves a child's interest to put him or her in a school situation which is not appropriate for their abilities and motivation. Certainly, we can take people and move them a great distance if they come with the right motivation and the right innate capacity, and we have.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much. Thank you for the response.

[The prepared statement of Senator Akaka follows:]

#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR AKAKA

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to speak about the District of Columbia private school voucher program and opportunities for educating the District's children. I want to take a moment to thank our witnesses for presenting testimony today. As a former educator and principal for the State of Hawaii, I passionately support public education and using public funds for public schools.

The District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) system has a long history of failing its students and the community. Prior to the Fenty Administration, the system underwent five major reform efforts in twenty years with no tangible improvements in student achievement. Low test scores, poor management, and a lack of financial accountability were some of the school systems' failures and many of these remain a problem today.

To address these problems, we need comprehensive solutions. The answer to public school reform cannot be diverting public funds to private school education. Instead, it is Congress's responsibility to provide support for the much harder job of reforming a failing public school system. That is why I opposed the creation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP), and I continue to have concerns with it.

The program was designed to be a five-year pilot test program. Under the legislation, the Department of Education's Institute for Education Sciences (IES) was required to provide Congress with rigorous report on several critical areas of student achievement and environment.

Today, OSP covers approximately 1,700 students, and the IES data show the program has had little impact on achievement. In the first two years, IES data did not show a positive impact on student achievement. The latest report shows a marginal impact on reading test scores for some students, but the report cautions that those findings may be a false discovery. Math scores remain unaffected. Most importantly, the study shows that students from schools in need of improvement—those who the program was designed to help—did not show improvement in reading or math.

Only 41 percent of students offered the scholarships used them for the whole three years of the study. Parents indicated that a lack of academic support at pri-

private schools was the number one reason students dropped out of OSP. The study also found that although parents gave the private schools higher marks on school satisfaction and safety, the students enrolled in OSP did not.

Voucher programs that allow a relatively small number of students to attend private schools distract attention from fixing public schools' failures. The challenge for public school systems is providing a high quality education for every child. Private schools are not required to admit every student regardless of his or her academic performance; they are not required to provide programs for students with special needs; and they are not accountable to the public.

When Mayor Fenty took office more than two years ago, he made a commitment to change the school system. To address the failing school system, Congress enacted legislation to give the Mayor control of DCPS. He then appointed a Deputy Mayor for Education and a Chancellor to implement needed reforms. The work Chancellor Rhee and Mayor Fenty have done to reform the school system is remarkable.

According to the DCPS annual progress report, elementary schools increased their reading scores by 8 percent and math proficiency by 11 percent in the first year of the reforms. Secondary schools improved proficiency in reading and math by 9 percent. Significantly more schools are meeting Adequate Yearly Progress and fewer schools have exceptionally low proficiency rates.

The school system is still not a portrait of perfection, and those reforms are not without controversy. Since the Mayor has taken control of the school system, I have held two hearings on the goals and progress of the school reform effort, and Senator Voinovich and I asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a short-term and long-term review of the reforms. Despite some criticism in GAO's initial assessment, DCPS appears to be on the right path to improving public education for the District's children. Later this summer, the second part of GAO's review will be released, and I look forward to seeing the progress made.

Beyond the Mayor's school system reform effort, D.C. Public Charter Schools offer students an alternative choice in public education. Dozens of Charter Schools offering a broad range of focuses and perspectives have a robust presence in the District.

Mr. Chairman, I believe we should be focusing our time, attention and resources on D.C.'s public schools. A strong public education system is the cornerstone of a healthy and prosperous society. Shifting public resources to private schools is not the solution.

I should note that I do not think it is fair for students enrolled in the program to be forced out of their schools, because moving schools can be disruptive to students' educational and social development.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today and finding a way forward that focuses our attention on reforming public education for all students in the District.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. Thank you, Senator Akaka.

I think the time has come when we are going to have to close the hearing; we have other matters to go on to. I want to thank all of the people who testified today and all of the people who came out.

I will say this for myself. And, again, I have been a supporter of this program, so I try to pull back and look at this dispassionately. And this morning, we have heard from a mother; two students; a former mayor who continues to be actively involved in this and close to people here in Washington, DC; the head of a major private school here that has accepted students as part of this program, providing what I would call anecdotal evidence, personal, experiential evidence, as to the value of the Opportunity Scholarship Program.

Then we have Dr. Wolf, who did a very comprehensive, rigorous investigation of the actual results of the program, and they show positive results. They give no basis for terminating the program. You could say that I wish they had done a little better in math, but there are statistically significant improvements in the students in the District who are a part of this program as compared to students in the public schools, and a very high level of parental satis-

faction with the Opportunity Scholarship Program, which clearly says something.

So I must say, based on the anecdotal and scientific evidence presented to the Committee this morning, I just do not think there is a rational reason to terminate this program. There is just not an acceptable reason to terminate the program. And I really challenge those who are acting to terminate it and, in fact, to put that provision into the Omnibus Appropriations Bill in Conference Committee to come forward and explain why they want to do it. Otherwise, people are left with a conclusion that in a critically important area of American life—it is hard to find one more critical, really, to our future than education—we have a program here, an experiment, that is giving some of our poorest children an opportunity to show what they can do, and they are doing it. And that is great for them, and that is great for our country.

So I find the sum total of this evidence to be very powerfully in favor of continuing the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. I am going to try to take this evidence to all of our colleagues and challenge them, as I just said. The next step, for the information of those who are here, is that we will go to Senator Reid, the Senate Majority Leader, and say to him, we are ready to bring a bill to the floor to have a debate on it, as you promised on the D.C. Voting Rights Act.

Somebody asked me during the recess when we went out to vote, what are the prospects? And I said, I am not kidding myself. There are some powerful forces allied against this program, but we happen to have the facts on our side. We also happen to have justice on our side.

Mr. STEWART. We do.

Chairman LIEBERMAN. But we have the facts on our side. Therefore, I would say we have a fighting chance. And, by God, together we are going to fight to keep this program doing.

I want to say to everybody as a matter of course that we will keep the record of the hearing open for 15 days for any additional statements or questions that the witnesses or Members of the Committee may have. But my thanks to all who took the time to be here and to all of you who have helped to build and sustain this program. It has been a very important morning. Thank you.

The hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:47 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]



## A P P E N D I X

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### **Prepared Statement of Latasha Bennett, Parent, Naylor Road School**

United States Senate  
Committee On  
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
Washington, DC 20510-6250

Re: "The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program".

Dear Senate Committee:

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, and fellow citizens. Thank you for inviting me to discuss how the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has provided a better opportunity for my child. My name is Latasha Bennett; I am a 37 year old single mother of 2 very intelligent children. My son Nico Thomas is 8 years old and is in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade at Naylor Rd. Private School. He is able to attend through the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program and he is excelling.

My annual income is approximately \$12,200. Therefore I fit the criteria for the low-income guidelines for the program. I am currently unemployed due to a disability that prevents me from working for long periods of time. I worked from the age of 14 up until I became disabled initially in 2000, I then waited several years thinking that I would be able to return to work in 2006, unfortunately that employment venture did not last long. I was supervising id records for the police department. I love working and performing office and Supervisor duties, and I can't wait to go back to work as soon as I'm able.

The Opportunity Scholarship Program has been a true blessing for me as well as Nico. He loves his school, his teacher, his friends, and the staff. Nico is part of the reading and debate club and now wants to be a doctor. His class consists of only 12 students therefore it is more hands on and the children are given more attention. They learn 2xs better than the large class he would experience at the DC public school assigned to my neighborhood Birney Elementary School. It would devastate my child if he were to have to leave Naylor Rd due to the fact that the OSP is on the chopping block and I can't afford to send him there on my own.

I already lost a nephew to the D.C. schools. You may remember the story Feb. 2, 2004 of James Richardson 17 year old, student at Ballou a star football player, who was shot inside the school. That was my nephew. His assigned neighborhood school was unsafe and had low expectations for the students. I wonder if he would be sitting here today as a success story, if a scholarship had been available for him to attend a private school. The scholarship provides my child an opportunity to be in a quality educational environment and I know he will be a productive citizen in the future. I will not lose my babies when they are so bright and willing to learn.

My daughter Nia Thomas is 4 years old. I receive a DHS voucher from the District of Columbia, which I also qualify for because of my income so that she can attend pre-school. I fought and advocated for her to be able to attend Naylor Road's Pre-K program at the Annex with the DHS voucher. Naylor Rd. School applied to participate in the program in July but they weren't approved until December. She started at the school the very next day. This was the best thing that has ever happened for Nia – she can write her name, she knows all her letters – she is so smart. I'm grateful that D.C. has the voucher for Pre-K so that she can learn and be ready for Kindergarten.

I applied for Nia to get a D.C. Opportunity Scholarship so that she could attend Naylor Rd. for the 09-10 school year. I was initially told that she was eligible for a scholarship, I was so elated. Then along came a retraction letter, and I was devastated and angry. I want Nia to have the same opportunity to excel as well as her older brother. Nia is so looking forward to going to Naylor Rd. with her brother that she continues to ask me "Mom when do I go to school with my brother"? I use to answer her and tell her very soon, now I don't know what to tell her. My children really need this program to continue, without it I truly don't have a clue as to where I will send them to school. My assigned neighborhood school is not an acceptable place, and options are so limited at this late date.

I would like to ask Mr. Secretary Arne Duncan how is it that my child should not be given the same opportunity as his children to get the best education possible. If Congress gave enough money, why is she being denied the opportunity to attend a great school, the same school as her brother? I have not told her that she is not going to Naylor rd. school, because I am pleading to the Committee, Mr. Duncan, to Mayor Fenty and our President OBAMA to get involved. The children are our future. I want to personally thank the 14 Senators that wrote Secretary Duncan asking him to reconsider his decision to end this most needed program. I also thank President OBAMA for extending the program for current students – but it's not enough. What am I to do now with my daughter who is entering Kindergarten and wants to attend the same school as her brother? Why is Nia not as important as the other children – doesn't she deserve the same opportunity to get an excellent education as her brother, a lot of Senators, Mayors and your beautiful daughters have? Please hear my plea about the severity of this matter to me and a lot of parents who are going through the same stress and anxiety of not knowing what is going to happen to our children's hopes and dreams for a better future and education.

I attended the rally last week in Freedom Plaza, and helped deliver a petition with over 7,400 D.C. residents that agree with me – the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program should continue as an option. But that's just the beginning, I'm going to continue to ask everyone to get involved in this very important issue and assure that this program does not end. The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program should be extended so that not only my children, but also the children of my friends and relatives, should have the opportunity to get the same type of education as your children are receiving.



Education is the #1 priority in my household and by allotting federal funding towards this program that is a success, shows great improvement on the part of our Government decision-making. It is evident that this program is working because the statistics show that the students have higher test scores. This program shows that low-income children can excel when given the opportunity. It gives parents such as myself **HOPE** for our future.

My children's future depends on this opportunity. They have bright goals for their future so please allow them to come true by continuing this program. Remember **our children are our future** and without the proper education what type of future will we have? So please recommit to this outstanding program, I thank you and so do Nico and Nia in advance, because we know that all of you know that education is key to their success. We believe you will make the right decision.

Thank You,

Latasha Bennett  
Concerned Parent

Congressional Hearing on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program  
Before the United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
Written Statement for Tiffany Dunston  
May 13, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for having a hearing on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. It is a tremendous honor that you invited me to speak with you about my experiences with the D.C. OSP. Being selected for a Scholarship changed my life and I hope to be the first college graduate in my family.

My family was overjoyed when I was selected to receive a DC Opportunity Scholarship before entering my freshman year of high school. I had dreamt of going to Archbishop Carroll high school but that was not possible. I lived with my grandmother who is disabled and she could not afford to send me to the school of my dreams. She applied for the scholarship because she wanted the best education for me.

Receiving a scholarship was a blessing for my family and put me on the path to success. I grew up in a neighborhood with a lot of poverty and crime. And there were such low expectations for kids in my neighborhood schools. I would watch kids hanging out on the streets and not going to school. My family also experienced our own tragedy. My motivation to get the best education possible was my cousin James who was shot and killed at 17. James was planning to attend college and play basketball. My cousin was going to be the first college graduate in my family, but he died before he was given that opportunity. Now I'm trying to step in his shoes and finish what he started. I am always thinking of what he could have done. To my family and to myself, I am a representation of what he could have done for my family and community. Through the DC OSP, I was afforded the opportunity to do just that. With the help of the scholarship my dream was realized. I had a say, a choice, in my education.

Now when I look back on my high school years I can definitely say that "I came a long way." This personal journey was made possible by my education at Archbishop Carroll. The environment at Carroll is so different from public schools in DC. From the activities and curriculum to the way we are expected to treat our peers and our studies, I was constantly pushed to be a better person and a better student. At a public school, there are constant distractions from school

work. With the scholarship, I was able to attend a school that provided a caring environment as well as a school where one-on-one relationships with teachers were possible. Additionally, Archbishop Carroll gives you a moral education: what is right, and what not to do. The rigorous environment provided by Archbishop Carroll helped me to become the hardworking individual I am today.

I just finished my freshman year at Syracuse University, where I received almost a full scholarship. I'm excited to go back for my sophomore year, and plan on majoring in biochemistry and minoring in French. I do look at myself as a DC success story, but I am not the only one who has seen such achievement. I have friends who are in the same place as I am. They were able to have a scholarship and they're so happy with their experiences and how their future now looks.

I was lucky enough to receive the Opportunity Scholarship for all four years of high school. Had my scholarship been terminated halfway through, I would not have been able to graduate from Archbishop Carroll at the top of my class. I am so grateful for this opportunity – and sad that the other families won't have the same opportunity for their children if this program is taken away.

While I was able to come a long way, I see the challenges that kids in DC still face. I am determined to be a part of this fight to continue this scholarship for other students. I have been very blessed and would like others to have this same opportunity. I am determined to build a better life for myself and through this Opportunity Scholarship I am on that path. I want others in my community to have that chance as well.

You have the ability to give other D.C. children the opportunity I had. My education gave me the chance at a successful future. Please don't end a program that worked for me and is benefiting tons of other children. Three years from now I'll be walking across a stage receiving my college diploma. Without the OSP, none of this would have been possible

Testimony of Ronald Holassie  
United States Senate  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
May 13, 2009

TO: Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee

My name is Ronald Holassie. I am currently Deputy Youth Mayor for Legislative Affairs for the District of Columbia. I am excelling and soaring to success. The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has changed my life and has made me the successful young man standing before you now. I credit this program greatly for my success.

But it all started in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. My mother was extremely concerned with my education. I was coming home almost every night with no homework and with poor grades. She was on the verge of sending me to her home country of Trinidad to go to school. Right around that time she found out about the Opportunity Scholarship Program, she applied and I was selected to receive the scholarship. My mother was very excited when she found out I was selected for the program. She felt that I now had a chance to receive a quality education and have a bright future. The program gave me a chance to change my life and be in a different high quality-learning environment. The program paid for my uniform and school tuition. My mother was so thankful because as a single parent she could not afford to pay for a private school.

Soon came the first day of school at a private school. I was quite nervous and didn't know what to expect. My first year was so much of a transition, having so many new expectations and requirements. I was forced to change and evolve. The next two years in the program I found myself changing so much. My study habits increased, I had better grades, I began to know my high expectations academically and I began to soar to success.

Then came my first year of high school at Archbishop Carroll. I made honor roll in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter. There were so many activities and clubs for me to participate in. I had a proper learning environment, a high quality education, and a brighter future ahead of me. I am about to go on to the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, which I now have found out would be my last year, unless the Opportunity Scholarship Program is re-authorized. Right before 12<sup>th</sup> grade, my road to a brighter future of success would be shut down. I am struck that someone would take away my chance and others chances of having a brighter future of success. Everything I have worked for in my high school years would be lost. My road to a brighter future would be stalled. This could cause me to go backward. You should never have to go back or look back when you are moving forward in a positive direction. My future of success would become a lost dream. I say this and mean this. No one should take away my future and dreams of becoming a successful young man. No one should take that away from me and the other 1,700 children in this program. We have been on a long road and have come so far and been through so much to get to where we are today.

One of my greatest passions is music, which was inspired by this program. I started writing lyrics while I was in this program as my reading and writing level in public school was so far behind that it became difficult for me to write lyrics successfully. The high quality education with the advanced level of reading and writing helped me advance my skills as a lyricist. I had music class in private school that taught me more and went into depth. I then discovered my voice and began singing. I then became better and began to evolve as a singer. Currently I have 6 albums of songs and I have recorded, written and co-produced my songs. I'm now working in the studio recording my promo. This has been my dream, which I am now achieving because of the Opportunity Scholarship Program.

I will again say, the Opportunity Scholarship Program must continue. There is no if, and, or but about it. Just as I have evolved and changed so much as a person, other Opportunity Scholarship Program recipients are doing so as well. My little brother, Richard, is also a recipient of the OSP. He is in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade at Preparatory School of DC and is doing really well. It is not only about me and Richard and the 1,700 current recipients. I want other children to have the same opportunity of school choice as we have had. I want them to evolve and succeed and have a brighter future. We are the future of DC, of the United States of America, and of the World. This program is so powerful and magnificent as it can change an individual and make them a better more successful person with a brighter future, just like me.

We are going to fight for this program until it is reauthorized. We are going to stand together for school choice. No one is going to take away my dream of a successful future. I now presently stand representing the youth of DC and the Opportunity Scholarship Program. Everyone should have a choice in where they are educated, including the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program.



Statement of Anthony A. Williams  
Former Mayor of Washington D.C. and Chairman of DC Children First

before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate

Hearing on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program

May 13, 2009

Good Morning Chairman Lieberman and members of the Committee. I greatly appreciate your leadership on numerous issues of great importance to the District of Columbia, especially on voting rights. Although the journey is far from over, District residents are closer to achieving the full fruits of American democracy thanks to this committee. In that vein, I am pleased to be here to speak about the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program – which has expanded educational options for low-income students in D.C. It remains an important element of school reform in DC and a lifeline to hope for thousands of families in the District of Columbia.

I would not be where I am today, and would not have been Mayor of the District had it not been for loving parents that made sure I had the very best education possible. I'm sure that the case for members of the Committee as well. Opportunity Scholarships have improved the education of thousands of children from low-income families, one of whom may be a future mayor of our city or perhaps even a congressperson, or, God willing, a senator.

As many of you know, I was present at the creation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. Some people claim that it was forced on the city by a Republican White House. This is not accurate and I'd like to set the record straight. This program was shaped and championed by D.C. leaders, including myself, Kevin P. Chavous, who was a member of the D.C. City Council and Chair of the Education Committee, and then President of the D.C. Board of Education, Peggy Cooper Cafritz, and numerous local parents, educators, and community leaders. We worked closely with the previous administration to develop what many refer to as a "three sector program" with unprecedented investments for all our children. The three sector program approach provides funds to the D.C. public schools, public charter schools, and D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program. We worked hard to craft a program that uplifted all schools and did not pit funding for one sector against funding for another. Not one dime was diverted from DCPS for this program. In fact, this program provides more money to the D.C. public schools to help fund needed improvements and Councilman Chavous and I worked hard to freeze the DCPS budget so that it kept the funding allocated to students who might have left DCPS using Opportunity Scholarships. My goal was for these new funds to improve all educational options in D.C. and let parents choose the best school for their child, with the hope that one day families in the District could have wonderful choices across the spectrum of schools.

As one would expect on any issue that generates strong opinions on a national level, there was not unanimity on whether the District should have vouchers for private school education. In fact, there were some who would have turned down support for public and public charter schools based solely on an ideological opposition to vouchers. I listened to these sentiments, but I also listened closely to the scores of low income parents who implored me to put children first. It became clear to me that there was no reason to deny these parents the opportunity to make the best choices for their children -- the same choices that more affluent people make every day. Indeed, there are still some who don't think that low-income parents should -- or are even capable of making these choices. I profoundly disagreed and vowed that we offer the opportunity and see, indeed, whether parents would take advantage of the options. And they did . . . in a very big way.

Five years later I am so pleased that the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has been a huge success. Over 2,600 students have used a scholarship to attend the D.C. school of their choice, and there is a high demand in the community with more than 8,000 children applying.

It was really important to me, and other original supporters, including Senator Dianne Feinstein, that the original bill contained an evaluation component. This program is unique because it was evaluated from its inception. We wanted to see how well the children who received a scholarship do on many factors (including test scores) and we wanted to track these children over time. The studies have found that children and families who received a scholarship have shown great results:

- Children have higher test scores.
- There is overwhelming parental satisfaction.
- Parents are more involved in their child's education.
- Students attend schools that are more integrated and have smaller class sizes.
- Children have an improved attitude toward learning, increased self-esteem and enthusiasm towards school.

The evaluation has shown that the children are making progress. Based on the data I'm perplexed that people say that the program doesn't work. We should continue the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program so that these children can continue to achieve and so other children have the same opportunity.

The scholarships are providing hope to D.C. residents that are most in need - families with an average income of \$24,300 and students who apply with standardized math and reading test scores in the bottom third. The parents in the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program were able to pick the best school for their child, something that more affluent families take for granted, and these children are now thriving.

Administering a program of this nature has not been easy. It is the first federally funded scholarship program for elementary and secondary level education. Moreover, verifying the income of families, many of whom are beneficiaries of public assistance, has added another layer of complexity. We are pleased that the General Accounting Office has reviewed the management of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. In November 2007 the GAO issued a report highlighting a number of areas where administrative and management practices could be improved. The program administrator, the Washington Scholarship Fund, has addressed these deficiencies and the program is improved. For example, WSF's Scholarship Invoicing Reports have been significantly improved to include, not just check amounts and itemized charges, but also let families know what fees are covered in each payment, the total billed for the for the school year, and how much money is left over for them to use. This gives families and schools the full information they need about their scholarship.



Having served as a mayor whose programs were subject to dozens of GAO reports, the findings on the DC OSP were certainly within the margins of reasonable improvements and overall, it demonstrated that the program has been administered successfully in the face of numerous complexities, challenges, and political oppositions.

I fully support the language that was included in the FY 09 Appropriations bill that for next school year all schools must have a valid Certificate of Occupancy and that the teachers of the students in the core-subject matters must hold a bachelor's degree. It's my understanding that this was the case in all but a few situations, and I appreciate the work that GAO does in helping all government programs improve.

The school choice environment is thriving in Washington D.C. There is the robust public charter school movement that is now educating over one-third of our students, there is high demand for the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, and there are improvements in the D.C. Public Schools. Mayor Adrian Fenty and Chancellor Michelle Rhee have been given unprecedented authority over the D.C. public schools, and acted boldly and aggressively to use this authority to improve the lives of children in the District. I applaud them for their bold reform efforts and admire their tenacity and obvious sense of urgency. Both of them are articulate supporters of school choice and recognize that every child benefits when parents have more than one option for a quality education choice.

I am Chairman of D.C. Children First, a nonprofit coalition of families, educators, business, and community leaders who have come together to support school reforms that will improve education for all children in the District, including providing more choices for low-income parents and providing quality educational opportunities for all. Other board members include former Council members Kevin P. Chavous and Sandra Allen; Maudine Cooper, President & CEO of the Greater Washington Urban League; Donald Hense, Founder, CEO, & Chairman of the Friendship Public Charter Schools; local philanthropist Joe Robert and numerous others.

I strongly urge the Committee to pass a reauthorization bill for the OSP. It is not enough to fund only the current children while not accepting new applications. That decision would split up families, could force the closure of some schools, and seems to be made based on political compromise rather than on the facts. It will be difficult to administer this program on a scale smaller than the current size. Participating schools will face higher per capital compliance burdens as the number of students dwindle. Moreover, it sends a mixed message to parents regarding the program's future and the certainty that their children can continue their educational path uninterrupted.

Quite frankly, I am befuddled by the proposal to have the program die by attrition. As a lifelong Democrat who has served 8 years as mayor of a predominantly African-American population beset by challenges to the basic family unit - most importantly, a decades long system of inferior education, I cannot understand why anyone could eliminate a program that has uplifted the lives, fulfilled the dreams, and given hope to thousands of low-income families.

I am not here to advocate for national policies or to speak beyond the needs of the city I served as mayor. I am here to say that given the "unique", sometimes I think the best word is "peculiar", relationship between the federal government and its capital city, the three sector program, including the DC OSP, is an appropriate and well deserved federal investment. I implore you not to curtail this linkage or otherwise thwart efforts that demonstrably improve education of young people in the District.

Last week, I spoke at a rally in support of school choice in D.C. Over 2,000 parents, children and members of the community came together in Freedom Plaza – a few blocks from where we are today. Every one with the common belief that all children deserve a quality education wherever it happens – in a public, public charter, or private school (including through the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program). These families presented a petition with over 7,400 signatures – all D.C. residents who not only support the program, but want it reauthorized and strengthened. What is a better measure of success than the desire of parents?

Let me leave you with just one example of many I could cite of children's lives changed by receiving a scholarship. A young woman Sanya, a senior at Archbishop Carroll High School said "it just shows the difference from 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade to where I am now, where my friends strive to succeed and they influence me to want to succeed along with them. So I'm really grateful for this opportunity". I'm told that at her previous school she was taken out of the gifted and talented program, but she now takes honors and AP classes, has a 3.95 GPA, is Vice President of her class, captain of her soccer team, a member of the lacrosse team, and president of the International club. She lives with her mother, who works part-time and never graduated from college. Sanya received almost a full scholarship to attend St. John's University.

I understand that advocates from across the country are weighing in again on this issue. I speak before you today, to ask that you put aside politics in favor of doing what is best for the children. Please reauthorize this program that I fought so hard to bring to Washington D.C. and allow the city's neediest residents, not just those currently in the program, the foundation they need to succeed in life - a good education. It is only fair to allow low-income parents the same choices that we all have, to select the best educational environment for their child. The long term prospects for our city depend on educating our children.

**Comments on the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program  
Before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security  
and Governmental Affairs  
Dirksen Center Office Building, SD-342**

**Bruce B. Stewart  
Head, Sidwell Friends School**

Thank you for having me here today to speak about this important issue. School choice, I believe, is as fundamentally American as apple pie, and DC's experimental Opportunity Scholarship Program is a significant means of providing District families with a whole new awareness regarding the best options for their children's academic growth. Indeed, this initiative has prompted scores of historically underserved people to think even more carefully, thoughtfully and critically about the education of their sons and daughters.

How America cultivates its human capacity will undoubtedly shape our national economic viability. As McKinsey and Company has so aptly noted in its recent research efforts, the racial, economic and regional gaps in education across our country "impose on the United States the economic equivalent of a permanent national recession." <sup>1</sup> That is a powerful observation.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools," McKinsey and Company, Social Sector Office, April, 2009. [http://www.mckinsey.com/client-service/socialsector/achievement\\_gap\\_report.pdf](http://www.mckinsey.com/client-service/socialsector/achievement_gap_report.pdf)

Bruce B. Stewart - May 13, 2009

Hence, I believe that we—and each of you in particular—must do all that can be done to sustain Opportunity Scholarships for the young people of the District.

I think we would all agree that choice and competition are fundamental threads in our country's fabric. We have, I believe, a strong national conviction regarding alternatives. Isn't it far more American to select from options and opportunity ranges—in the marketplace, in health care, in vocation, in religion, in location of our homes, in election of our public officials—and in a host of other key value decisions—than to select from heavily restricted options or a single, forced choice.

For me, involvement with OSP has brought my own early public school experience vividly back to life. As a young man who grew up in a largely immigrant community in Lynn, Massachusetts, I hold clear recollections of family and neighbors deeply concerned about the community's schools and the opportunities they did or did not present for their children. Hence, throughout my career as an academic administrator, I have maintained the strong conviction that every child should have the option to attend a school of appropriate academic fit regardless of place of residence. In my time, public, parochial, independent, vocational and boarding schools were all options. Choice was often the product of particular personal or family beliefs, but academic rigor and preparation for vocational and college study were also

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top-tier considerations. It is good to see these mindsets returning to the forefront in DC, and to know that families are once again engaging in a reflective discussion about their children's school placement. I think there is little question that society benefits immensely when opportunities are offered to all, not simply to some.

Let me offer a personal observation from my own career journey. My first full-time teaching assignment was in public education in Greensboro, North Carolina just after the "sit-ins" at the now historical Woolworth lunch counter. As a teacher and ninth grade guidance counselor, a very important part of my work was with a dozen or so young Black Americans who were the first of their race to enter Walter Hines Page High School. They were "given choice," but that "opportunity" required unparalleled courage and conviction—and led them through great personal pain and sacrifice—simply to "enjoy" equal access. That experience immediately inspired in me a strong determination to do all that I could to see that every young American, regardless of background, received a fair chance at the best education possible. It is still my hope that this goal will one day be fully met, and not as a matter of random occurrence but rather through carefully reasoned public policy.

School integration by race has made a true difference, and I believe that greater school mixture by economic standing must continue. We must not allow one racial

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or socio-economic tier of our society to flourish while others languish. The one and the many are and must continue to be inextricably intertwined if we are to achieve the full potential so powerfully present in our ever-maturing democracy. For justice's sake, we cannot have the connected rife with choice while the disenfranchised remain captured by circumstance!

Over the past fifty years, I have personally experienced the maturation of our society's growing commitment to racial equality. Serving as one of the founders of the North Carolina School of the Arts (working with Governor Sandford), as a consultant to the development of the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics (working with Governor Hunt), as Director of Admissions, Provost and Acting President at Guilford College, as Head of Abington Friends School, and now as Head of School at Sidwell Friends, I have thankfully had numerous opportunities to advocate for social justice. In each case, one of my professional priorities was increasing student access, not only in terms of race, but also in relation to economic background. It made no sense to me, as the son of a Scottish immigrant who attended school only through the third grade, not to do all in my power to make certain that every child could gain access to the school of his or her choice. My father's words always echoed in my ears: "Boy, I crossed the great pond [the Atlantic] to give you learning opportunities that I could never enjoy. Don't ever make excuses. Achieve! Be all that you can be!" That was his dream for me, and for

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nearly fifty years that has been my dream, as an educator, for every American child.

I am very proud of the fact that today Sidwell Friends School enrolls a truly diverse community of students. Currently, we serve two students who have qualified for OSP grants and three who are Signature Scholarship recipients—both programs being administered by the Washington Scholarship Fund. Each of these young people has prospered, having worked determinedly to take full advantage of the School's varied and rigorous curricular and co-curricular programs. Sidwell Friends is honored to be their school of choice. Clearly, all of these youngsters—and many more enrolled at other independent and non-public schools across the District—reached for a challenging education.

When the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program was originally announced there were many members of the independent school community who were quite qualified in their endorsement of it. Sidwell Friends School, however, felt that young boys and girls should not be trapped in a school ineffective for them and their needs and abilities simply by quirk of birthplace, race, income or current home address. Therefore, I am happy to say that SFS was the first such institution to step forward to participate in the OSP, and without any measure of reservation. We believed that a new set of applicants from modest economic circumstances would be motivated to consider independent and other educational options because they would now have the

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support—fiscal and otherwise—to do so. As a result, Sidwell Friends School would be able to educate and benefit additional deserving children. And, while we felt we would proffer great service to them, there was no doubt in our minds that they, in turn, would significantly enrich our school community by bringing an invaluable perspective into our classrooms.

As Neil Rudenstine, former President of Harvard University, once so aptly observed, what an academic value it is to have “every face present and every voice heard” in the classrooms of our nation. There is no way, he knew, of achieving the academic excellence we all seek without that crucial variety. Yes, access is morally appropriate, but diversity is absolutely fundamental to learning at the highest level. I think of my own teaching of high school economics. What kind of classroom could one have, and what sort of discourse could one prompt—in a discussion, for example, of national housing policy—if nearly everyone present is either from the comfort of affluence or the challenge of poverty. Good exploration of any concept requires multiple voices and varied perspectives, and not narrowly synonymous thought. For authentic excellence in education, we desperately need to ensure that there is a true mixture of diversity and complexity in all of our academic dialogues.

The Opportunity Scholarship Program is the beginning of the opening up of the genuine possibility for all American students to know and experience one

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another. What could be better for the goal of ending the polarity of “red and blue” in America, which I know you desire, than the creation of a nation of citizens who respect and understand the perspectives held by people of differing backgrounds and viewpoints. Our collective essence as Americans has always been the source of our truest strength. Please don’t allow this important step toward pluralism that OSP represents to recede. Keep the windows you have opened open, and unlock even more! Go forward and not backward: enlarge our national vision, do not narrow it!

Horace Mann, who was an early and distinguished national leader of public education in America, called upon us “to be ashamed to die until we have won some victory for humanity.” I strongly implore you to make certain that the positive steps already taken with OSP do not slip quietly away by virtue of inaction. Ensuring the opening of our educational system so that all are served and served well cannot be left to a matter of chance; rather, it must be brought to a condition of certainty. Continuance of the Opportunity Scholarship Program is one powerful step in that direction!

Thank you.

Bruce B. Stewart - May 13, 2009

**DR. PATRICK J. WOLF**

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR THE HEARING "THE D.C. OPPORTUNITY  
SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM: PRESERVING SCHOOL CHOICE FOR ALL"**

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL  
OPERATIONS**

**MAY 13TH, 2009**

Mr. Chairman and Senators,

I am pleased to be with you today to discuss the results of the three-year impact evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP). I am the principal investigator of an outstanding team of researchers conducting that congressionally mandated study supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. I am also a professor of education policy at the University of Arkansas with more than a decade of experience evaluating school choice programs in the District of Columbia and other U.S. cities. Although the facts that I present to you today are taken directly from the impact evaluation, the ideas and opinions that I express are mine alone and do not necessarily represent any official positions of the evaluation team, the University of Arkansas, the Institute of Education Sciences or the U.S. Department of Education.

**Study Background**

Our evaluation of the OSP uses the most rigorous research method available for determining the impact of this school choice program. Parents who seek schooling options for their children are likely to be highly motivated to promote their children's educational success. That high level of parental motivation that leads parents to participate in school choice programs probably also contributes to greater student achievement over time, leading to what we call "self-selection bias" in the research world.

To ensure that parent motivation does not bias studies of school choice programs, researchers over the past decade have focused on evaluating them using experimental research designs called Randomized Control Trials (RCTs). With an RCT design, a group of students that all qualify for a voucher or scholarship program and whose parents are equally motivated to exercise school choice are subject to a scholarship lottery. The students who win the lottery become the experimental "treatment" group. The students who lose the lottery become the experimental control group. Since only a school voucher and mere chance distinguish the treatment students from their control counterparts, any subsequent difference in student outcomes for the treatment students can be reliably attributed to the voucher intervention. That is, the outcomes from the control group represent what would have happened to the treatment group absent the program, and the treatment impact is therefore the treatment outcomes minus the control outcomes. Because of the rigor of experimental designs they are often dubbed the "gold standard" for policy evaluations and are widely used to evaluate the efficacy of medical drugs and procedures prior to such treatments being made available to the public.

**Student and School Participation**

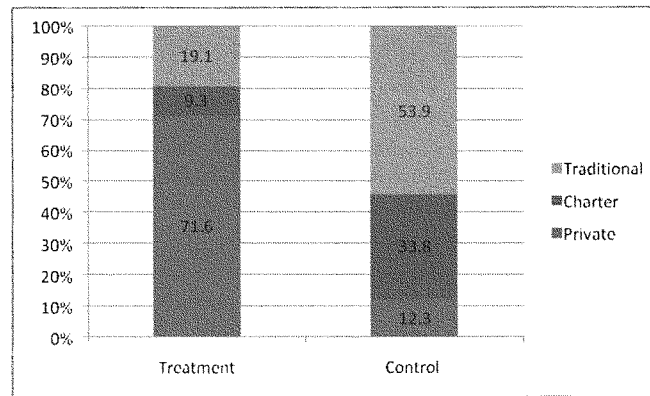
Two cohorts of students were followed for purposes of this evaluation. All of the students were attending public schools or rising Kindergartners at the time of application. Cohort 1 consisted of 492 students entering grades 6-12 in 2004. Cohort 2 consisted of 1,816 students entering grades K-12 in 2005. The characteristics and outcomes of these two groups, combined into an impact sample of 2,308 students by lagging the Cohort 1 outcomes by one year, have been the focus of our impact evaluation. At total of 1,387 students in the impact sample won the scholarship lottery and were thereby assigned to the treatment group, while the remaining 921 students who did not win the lottery were thereby assigned to the control group. Over the five years of program operation, other students have received scholarships without having to go through the lottery. These students were not included in the rigorous impact evaluation because no appropriate comparison group is available for them.

Evidence from the study confirms that the OSP serves a highly disadvantaged group of DC students. Descriptive information from the first two annual reports about program participation indicates that over 90 percent of students are African American and nine percent are Hispanic. Their family incomes averaged less than \$20,000 in the baseline year in which they applied for the program. Overall, participating students were performing well below national norms in reading and math when they applied to the program. Forty-four percent of students in both cohorts were attending a public school designated as "in need of improvement" (SINI) between 2003 and 2005.

The Opportunity Scholarship Program is designed to facilitate the enrollment of low-income District students in private schools of their parents' choosing. It does not and cannot guarantee enrollment in a private school, but the \$7,500 voucher should make such enrollments relatively common among the students who won the scholarship lottery. The eligible students who lost the scholarship lottery and therefore were assigned to the control group still might attend a private school but they would have to do so by drawing upon resources outside of the OSP. At the same time, students in both the scholarship treatment group and the control group have access to a large number of public charter schools in the District.

The implications of these realities is that, for this evaluation of the OSP, assignment to the treatment group does not necessarily mean private schooling and assignment to the control group does not necessarily mean education in a traditional public school. Members of both the treatment and control groups attended all three types of schools – private, public charter, and traditional public – in year 3 of the voucher experiment, though the proportions that attended each type differed significantly based on whether or not they won the scholarship lottery (figure 1). Almost 72 percent of the students who won the voucher lottery and provided outcome data in year 3 were attending private schools. Only 12 percent of the students who lost the voucher lottery were enrolled in private schools in year 3. Over nine percent of the treatment students chose to attend a public charter school three years after receiving a scholarship offer, compared to almost 34 percent of the control group who opted for that public school choice option. About 19 percent of the treatment group students were enrolled in traditional public schools three years after the scholarship lottery, compared with nearly 54 percent of control group students in such schools.

I see these data as underscoring that the desire for an alternative to a neighborhood public school was strong for the families who applied to the OSP in 2004 and 2005. About 81 percent of them placed their child in a private or public school of choice three years after winning the scholarship lottery and 46 percent of them did likewise even if they lost the lottery. This was a group of families with a strong motivation to exercise parental school choice.

**Figure 1. Types of Schools Attended by the Treatment and Control Groups in Year 3**

Source: Wolf et al., *The Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years* (NCEE 2009-4050), Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2009, Table 2-7.

The enrollment pattern of students in the evaluation also highlights the fact that the comparison of the treatment and control groups in year 3 does not amount to a comparison between “all choice” and “no choice.” Instead, it is a comparison of outcomes between a group exercising lots of private school choice and some public school choice with a group exercising a small amount of private school choice and a substantial amount of public school choice. Any differences between the outcomes of the treatment and control groups therefore indicate the incremental impact of adding private school choice through the OSP to the existing schooling options for low-income DC families.

If one's purpose is to evaluate the effects of a specific public policy, such as the OSP, then the comparison of the average outcomes of the treatment and control groups, regardless of what proportion attended which types of school, is most appropriate. A school voucher program cannot force scholarship recipients to use a voucher, nor can it preclude control group students from attending private schools at their own expense. A voucher program only can offer students scholarships that they subsequently may or may not use. Nevertheless, the mere offer of a scholarship, in and of itself, clearly has no impact on the educational outcomes of students. A scholarship could only change the future of a student if it were actually used.

Fortunately, two statistical techniques are available that draw upon the unbiased results of the pure experimental analysis of treatment and control group differences. In the opinion of many researchers, including myself, these methodological approaches produce reliable estimates of the average effect of using a voucher compared to not being offered one and the average effect of attending private school with or without a voucher compared to not attending private school. The technique that produces the estimate of the effect of using a voucher is called a Bloom adjustment. Since lottery winners who never used a scholarship could not have been affected by

it, the average impact of the voucher program on student outcomes that was generated by the entire sample of treatment students – users and non-users alike – is simply re-scaled by dividing it by the percentage of the treatment group that actually availed themselves of the treatment. For example, if 80 percent of the treatment students used their scholarships at any time since the voucher lottery and the treatment group as a whole averaged test score outcomes that were 4 points higher than the control group, the Bloom-adjusted estimated effect of using a scholarship on test scores would be 4/.8 or 5 points.

The method for estimating the effect of attending versus not attending private schools, called Instrumental Variable (IV) analysis, produces estimates that tend to be larger than Bloom-adjusted estimates because they adjust for both non-use of the scholarship by the treatment group and private school attendance by members of the control group. As such, an IV analysis of the effect of private schooling is not an evaluation of a school voucher program *per se* but, instead, is an evaluation of the effect of the condition (private school enrollment) that a voucher program seeks to facilitate. Because such analyses place heavy demands on the underlying data, smaller differences that are found to be statistically significant at the purely experimental stage can end up as larger differences that are not statistically significant when estimated through IV analysis. All three effect estimates – purely experimental, effect of use, and effect of private schooling – are provided in the remainder of this testimony so that individual readers can decide which outcomes are most relevant to their considerations.

#### **The Opportunity Scholarship Program and Student Achievement**

Our analysis of the data after three years of participation in the OSP revealed that the program had a statistically significant positive impact on the test scores of students in reading (table 1). The positive impact of the voucher program on student reading scores after three years amounted to an average gain of 4.5 scale score points across the entire treatment group, 5.3 scale score points for scholarship users in the treatment group, and 7.1 scale score points for attending private versus public school. These results are statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. We know from this study that participating DC students are reading at higher levels as a result of the Opportunity Scholarship Program.

**Table 1. Year 3 Overall Achievement Impact Estimates of the Scholarship Offer, Use of a Scholarship, and Private Schooling**

Student Achievement	Impact of the Scholarship Offer			Impact of Scholarship Use	Effect of Private Schooling
	Treatment Group Mean	Control Group Mean	Difference (Estimated Impact)	Adjusted Impact Estimate	IV Estimate
Reading	635.4	631.0	4.5*	5.3*	7.1*
Math	630.2	629.4	.8	1.0	NA

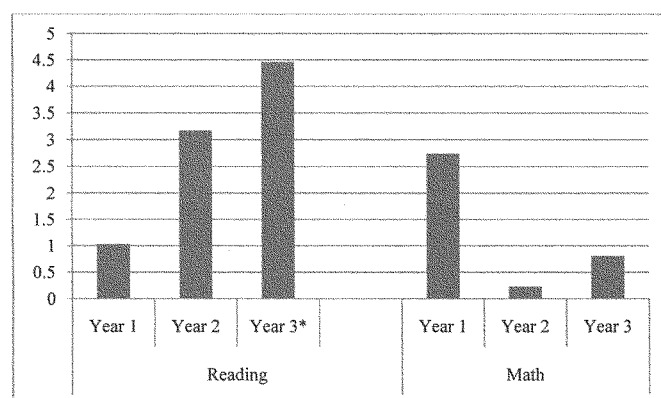
\*Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

SOURCE: Wolf et al., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years...*, Tables 3-2 and E-1.

No statistically significant impacts were observed in math and therefore no estimate of the effect of private schooling on math achievement was attempted by the evaluation team (table 1).

Examined over time, the pure experimental impacts of the scholarship offer appear to show a trend towards larger reading gains cumulating for students in the program (figure 2). Especially when one considers that students who used their scholarship in year 1 needed to adjust to a new and different school environment, the experimental reading impacts of 1 scale score point (not significant) in the first year, 3.2 scale score points (not significant) in the second year, and 4.5 scale score points (significant) in the third year suggest that students are consistently gaining in reading performance relative to their control group peers the longer they experience the OSP. No such trend is apparent regarding math achievement.

**Figure 2. Experimental Achievement Impacts of Scholarship Offer in All Three Years of Evaluation**



\*Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

SOURCE: Wolf et al., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years* . . . Figure 3-3.

In sum, the OSP generated clear achievement gains in reading after three years but no discernible impacts in math.

#### **The Pattern of Achievement Impacts by Key Subgroups**

Beyond the crucial question of whether or not students tended to benefit academically from a program, policymakers and the broader public are often interested more specifically in who benefited and by how much. To address this question, the evaluation of the OSP has examined the impacts of the program for specific subgroups of students. Such subgroup analyses require that evaluators carve up the overall study sample into smaller constituent parts. As a result, less data inform each impact estimate, making them less precise and therefore less likely to identify statistically significant impacts. In addition, evaluating the impact of a program on different sub-

groupings of participants requires multiple significance tests, any one of which, at the 95 percent confidence level, has about a 5 percent chance of being a false discovery. With each subgroup impact examined, the risk of at least one false discovery increases somewhat. The impact evaluation conducted statistical tests to determine which subgroup findings could be false discoveries. As a result, three types of findings emerge from the subgroup analysis in the evaluation: findings that are clearly statistically significant, findings that are statistically significant with reservations (because “false discovery” could not be ruled out), and findings that are not statistically significant.

When examined as separate subgroups, three types of students clearly experienced significant reading impacts as a result of three years in the OSP (table 2). Public school students who were not attending schools in need of improvement prior to entering the program gained an average of 6.6 scale score points in reading if in the treatment group, 7.7 scale score points from using a scholarship, and 10.3 scale score points from private schooling. Students in the higher two-thirds of the performance distribution, whose average reading test score was at the 37<sup>th</sup> National Percentile Rank at baseline, gained 5.5, 6.2, and 9.5 scale score points in reading achievement from the scholarship offer, scholarship use, and private schooling respectively. Students entering K-8 at baseline, where slots were plentiful in a wide variety of participating private schools, gained 5.2, 6.0, and 8.3 scale score points in reading from the scholarship offer, scholarship use, and private schooling after three years. These impact estimates were statistically significant and remained so after adjustments for multiple comparisons.

Two other individual subgroups of students demonstrated reading impacts from the program that were not as robust. Female students gained an average of 5.1 scale score points in reading from the scholarship offer, 5.9 scale score points from using a scholarship, and 6.1 scale score points from private schooling. Students in Cohort 1 – the eager “first movers” into the program – gained 8.7, 11.7, and 15.8 scale score points in reading from the scholarship offer, scholarship use, and private schooling respectively. However, the estimation of the private schooling effect was not statistically significant and statistical tests indicated that the impacts of the scholarship offer and scholarship use could have been false discoveries for both of these subgroups.

Reading impacts for the other five subgroups examined individually – applicants from schools in need of improvement (i.e. SINI), students in the lower one-third of the performance distribution at baseline, males, students entering high school grades at baseline, and students in Cohort 2 – were not statistically significant after three years. This does not mean that those subgroups of students did not benefit from the program, as research results never prove a negative, but it does mean that reading gains were not clearly evident at the subgroup level for those types of students. The fact that significant reading impacts were not observed for the subgroup of SINI students is noteworthy, since Congress designated SINI students as the highest service priority for the program. Math impacts were not statistically significant for any of the 10 subgroups examined.

**Table 2. Year 3 Subgroup Achievement Impact Estimates of the Scholarship Offer, Use of a Scholarship, and Private Schooling**

Student Achievement	Impact of the Scholarship Offer			Impact of Scholarship Use	Effect of Private Schooling
	Treatment Group Mean	Control Group Mean	Difference (Estimated Impact)	Adjusted Impact Estimate	IV Estimate
SINI never	625.3	618.7	6.6**	7.7**	10.3*
Higher performance	644.7	639.3	5.5*	6.2*	9.5*
<i>Female</i>	<i>639.3</i>	<i>634.2</i>	<i>5.1*</i>	<i>5.8*</i>	<i>6.1</i>
K-8	627.3	622.1	5.2**	6.0**	8.3*
<i>Cohort 1</i>	<i>672.9</i>	<i>664.2</i>	<i>8.7*</i>	<i>11.7*</i>	<i>15.8</i>

\*Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. Subgroup results in italics were not statistically significant after adjustments for multiple comparisons.

SOURCE: Wolf et al., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years...*, Tables 3-3 and E-1.

### Overall Impacts on Parent and Student Satisfaction

Whenever school choice researchers have asked about satisfaction with schools, parents who were given the chance to select their child's school have reported much higher levels of satisfaction. Students themselves, for any number of possible reasons, have rarely described themselves as more satisfied with the new schools chosen by their parents. The year 3 satisfaction results from the OSP evaluation fit this pattern of previous studies. The proportion of parents who assigned a high grade of A or B to their child's school was 11 percentile points higher if they were in the treatment group, 12 percentile points higher if their child actually used a scholarship, and 21 percentiles higher if they were attending private school in year 3 of the study. Parents also were significantly more confident of the safety of their children in school if they had been awarded an Opportunity Scholarship. Students in grades 4-12, when asked similar questions, were no more likely to be satisfied with their school or describe it as safe if they were in the treatment compared to the control group.

### Interpreting the Findings

What does this pattern of results suggest about the effectiveness of the OSP? Any answer to that question is bound to be somewhat subjective, so I think the best way to begin is to compare the achievement impacts from the OSP with those from randomized control trial of other education programs.

The National Center for Educational Evaluation (NCEE) at the Institute of Education Sciences has released the results of 11 studies that, like this one, employ the methodological rigor of random assignment to treatment and control groups. The DC OSP evaluation is one of only three of these 11 NCEE studies to report overall statistically significant positive achievement impacts in either reading or math (table 3). The other two discreet federal education programs which have been confirmed to deliver overall achievement impacts are Enhanced Reading Opportunities and After-School Programs and Enhanced Academic Instruction. The size of the reading gain from Enhanced Reading Opportunities is 40 percent smaller than, and the math gain from After School Programs is less than half of, the reading gain



from the DC OSP, which has shown the largest statistically significant impact of any NCEE experimental study.

**Table 3. NCEE Intervention Studies in Order of Significance of Achievement Impacts, May 2009**

<b>NCEE Single Intervention Study</b>	<b>Overall Significant Impact</b>	<b>Partial or Subgroup Sig. Impact</b>
1 DC Opportunity Scholarship Program	<b>positive</b> (reading), <b>no effect</b> (math) (3 years) Effect size = 0.13 (reading)	some positive subgroups, some no effect
2 Enhanced Reading Opportunities	<b>positive</b> (1 year) Effect size = 0.08 (reading)	some positive subgroups, some no effect
3 After-School Programs and Enhanced Academic Instruction	<b>positive</b> (math), <b>no effect</b> (reading) (1 year) Effect size = 0.06 (math)	n/a
4 Student Mentoring Program	<b>no effect</b>	some positive subgroups, some no effect
5 Reading First	<b>no effect</b> (3 years)	improvements in student decoding skills
6 Classroom Literacy Interventions and Outcomes in Even Start	<b>no effect</b> (literacy measures)	improvements in parenting skills and children's social skills
7 Teacher Certification Routes	<b>no effect</b>	n/a
8 Comprehensive Elementary Teacher Induction	<b>no effect</b> (student achievement, teachers' practices, or teacher retention rates)	n/a
9 Professional Development Interventions for Early Reading	<b>no effect</b> (test scores)	no subgroup effects
10 Impact of Selective Supplemental Curricula on Reading Comprehension	<b>3 no effect, 1 negative</b> (1 year)	Some no subgroup effects, some negative
11 Closing the Gap Impacts on Reading (Title I)	<b>2 no effect</b> (3rd reading & math), <b>2 negative</b> (5th reading & math) (1 year)	some positive subgroups, some no effect
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>1 positive, 2 some positive/some no effect, 6 no effect, 2 some no effect/some neg.</b>	

SOURCE: Calculated from review of the most recent evaluation reports where interventions were compared to a control group (see <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/>). Evaluations that merely compared interventions to each other are excluded.

Six other education programs -- covering approaches such as student mentoring, Reading First, classroom interventions in Even Start, alternative teacher certification, initial teacher training, and professional development -- have not demonstrated statistically significant achievement impacts overall. Two programs demonstrated a mix of non-significant and negative impacts on achievement. Several of these education programs have only been evaluated for one

or two years, and could show significant achievement impacts in subsequent reports. The larger point is that many federal education programs targeted at disadvantaged students are now the subjects of rigorous evaluations. Most of these programs have yet to demonstrate the ability to move disadvantaged students to significantly higher levels of academic achievement. In my opinion, by demonstrating statistically significant impacts overall in reading based on an experimental evaluation, the DC OSP has met a tough standard for efficacy in serving low-income inner-city students.

At the same time, the fact that students who had been attending public schools in need of improvement (SINI), as a distinct subgroup, have yet to show significant gains from the program should not be ignored. The SINI students were designated by Congress as a service priority for the program. The data suggest that, as a subgroup, SINI students thus far are no better or worse off academically if they were offered a scholarship. It also is important to repeat that the statistically significant OSP gains, overall and for half of the subgroups, thus far have been limited to reading. Although significant gains were observed for two subgroups in math after one year, statistical tests suggested they might be false discoveries and no significant math impacts have been detected since.

How large are the statistically significant reading gains observed in the OSP overall and for half of the subgroups after three years? The magnitude of the gains may lie in the eyes of the beholder. One constructive way to view achievement gains, however, is in terms of additional months of instruction. The overall gains from the OSP observed after three years mean that members of the control group, who represent what scholarship students would have experienced absent the program, would need to remain in school an extra 3.7 months on average to catch up to the level of reading achievement obtained by scholarship users (table 4). When the IV procedure is used to adjust for control group students attending private schools, we see that private schooling added nearly five months of achievement to the reading skills of students over the three years of the study. If you were to ask a group of low-income inner-city parents if they would enroll their child in an education program that has demonstrated the ability to produce such reading achievement gains, I suspect that most of them would say "yes."

**Table 4. Estimated Impacts in Months of Schooling of the Scholarship Offer, Use of a Scholarship, and Private Schooling for Statistically Significant Reading Impacts After 3 Years**

Student Achievement: Reading	Months of Schooling		
	Impact of the Scholarship Offer	Impact of Scholarship Use	Effect of Private Schooling
Full sample	3.1	3.7	5.0
SINI never	4.1	4.9	6.5
Higher performance	4.0	4.6	7.0
<i>Female</i>	<i>3.1</i>	<i>3.6</i>	<i>3.7</i>
K-8	2.9	3.3	4.6
<i>Cohort 1</i>	<i>14.1</i>	<i>18.9</i>	<i>25.5</i>

Subgroup results in italics were not statistically significant after adjustments for multiple comparisons.

SOURCE: Wolf et al., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years...*, Table 3-4.

Private schooling appears to have had its largest impact on the reading achievement of Cohort 1 students, increasing it by over 25 months, though that result for this relatively small subgroup of students is not very robust and should be interpreted with caution. Female students gained 3.7 months (also not very robust), K-8 students 4.6 months, applicants from non-SINI schools 6.5 months, and higher baseline performers 7 months of reading, respectively, due to the private schooling opportunities made possible by the OSP.

If these trends were to continue over the entire educational experience of a typical treatment student who entered the program in Kindergarten, my calculation is that the student would be reading two-and-a-half years ahead of her peers in the control group who did not receive an Opportunity Scholarship by the time she graduated from high school. The reading gains from private schooling demonstrated by OSP students after three years are equivalent to about one-quarter of the notorious Black-White achievement gap. Although it is mere speculation at this point whether the impacts we have observed will continue at these levels, over 13 years of K-12 education, similar results would eliminate the racial gap in reading performance entirely.

#### **Future Research**

The current rigorous evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program makes important contributions to our understanding of the effects of voucher programs and of private school attendance. However, there is much more that could be learned from the OSP – either through new data collection or even new analyses of what we have already obtained. The most important questions that remain to be explored include:

##### ***1. What are the impacts of the program after four or five years of participation?***

The research team is well along in the process of collecting follow-up data from Cohort 1 after five years and Cohort 2 after four years since students were randomly assigned to the treatment and control groups. Analysis of those data will indicate if the achievement impacts observed for the OSP students after three years grow or fade, and will be an important topic of our final evaluation report, planned for release next spring.

##### ***2. Does the OSP improve high school graduation and college enrollment rates?***

Unlike many other scholarship programs, the OSP enrolled older students (beyond grade 6). Although in our final report next year we will estimate the impacts of the program on educational attainment, only a relatively small proportion of students are old enough to be included in that analysis. In the coming years, there will be a substantial group of OSP students of high school age or older. Recent studies of charter schools suggest that their biggest impact may be on educational attainment. It is important to know whether or not voucher programs have the same effects.

##### ***3. How do participating private schools differ from the public school students would have attended?***

The current evaluation is not the first to find academic benefits for students who use scholarships, but none have been able to adequately explore – much less determine

empirically – why or how these impacts happen. There are many hypotheses: better instruction, better peer group of students, higher expectations set, more discipline, a smaller more nurturing school community, greater parent involvement. We surveyed parents, students, and public and private school principals about these school characteristics, but because of resource and time constraints, have only begun to tap the surface of examining the environments and organization of the two types of schools. A key question is whether there are differences in instructional strategies or teacher quality, two factors found in other studies to affect student achievement. Such an investigation would likely require site visits, classroom observations, and surveys of teachers of students in the impact sample, which all have been beyond the scope of the current federal evaluation.

#### **4. *Who participates in the OSP and who drops out?***

We have learned that, by year 3, almost half of the students who received an OSP scholarship have either graded out (graduated from high school), earned out (change in family income makes them ineligible), moved out of the District, or left the program for other reasons. It would be possible to use the current evaluation data to explore what types of students initially applied to the program, how and why students move in and out of scholarship use and private school enrollment, and how these patterns relate to program impacts. This information might help organizations that run voucher or private school scholarship programs identify students who might need additional programmatic supports and what types of supports might be helpful.

#### **5. *Does the OSP have any effect on racial integration?***

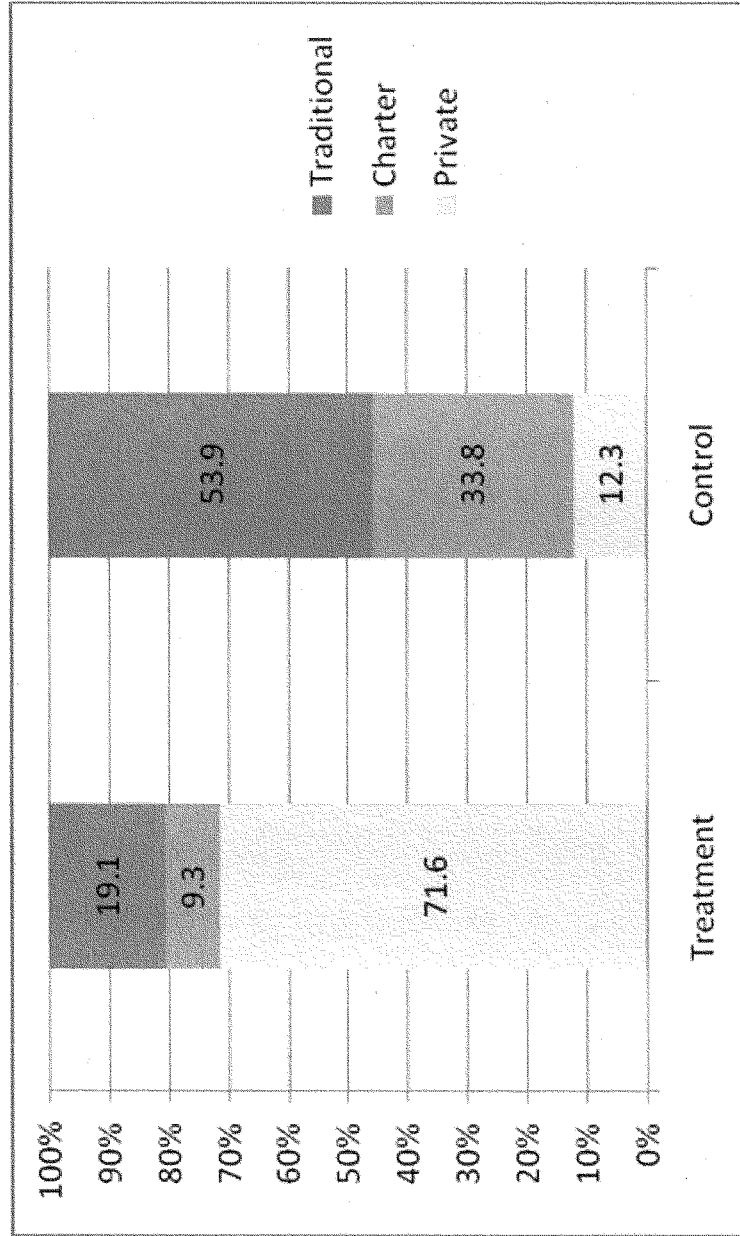
Many people are concerned that school choice programs may affect the racial diversity of schools. It might be possible, with the current evaluation data, to estimate the impacts of the program on the racial composition of District of Columbia public and private schools. We could address two important policy questions surrounding scholarship programs. First, do the students who participate in such programs end up enrolled in schools with greater racial diversity than they otherwise would have experienced? Second, are the schools that scholarship participants leave as a result of the program better integrated racially as a consequence. The combination of school-reported and individual level data that we have collected provides a unique opportunity to examine these important questions.

#### **Conclusion**

For the past five years, the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program has provided income-disadvantaged students with government-financed scholarships or vouchers to facilitate their enrollment in participating private schools selected by their parents. Having collected and analyzed data from the first three years of student experiences with the OSP, we have learned much about the program. Students overall are reading at higher levels as a result of the OSP. No impacts have been observed in Math achievement. When the data are parsed into smaller subgroups, half of those individual subgroups of students are demonstrating reading gains as a result of the program. The SINI students, who are a service priority of the program, and four other student subgroups have not shown significant achievement impacts to date. Parents, but not students, say that they are more satisfied with their schools if offered an Opportunity Scholarship and they view those schools as safer.

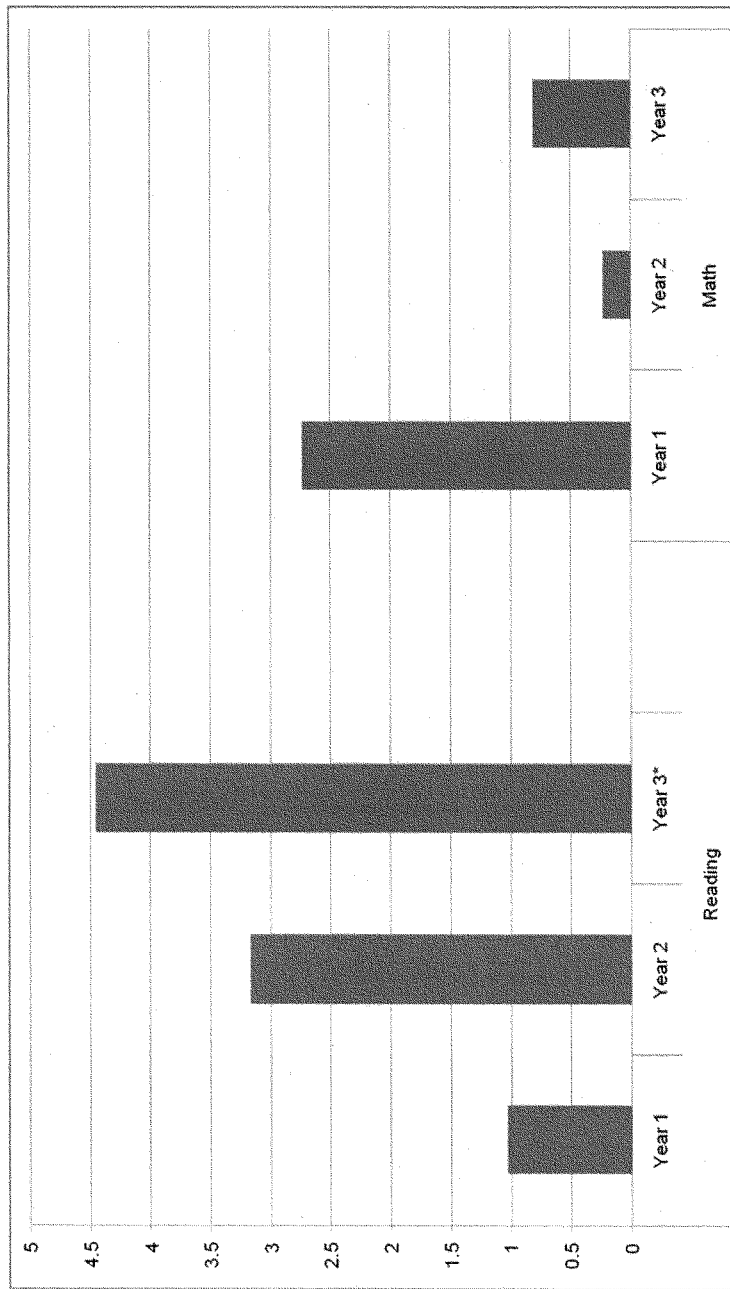
Through a rigorous evaluation, much knowledge has been gained about the nation's first federally-funded school voucher program. We expect that more will be learned about this policy intervention in the future.

**Figure 1. Types of Schools Attended by the Treatment and Control Groups in Year 3**



Source: Wolf et al., *The Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years* (NCEE 2009-4050), Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2009, Table 2-7.

**Figure 2. Achievement Impacts of Scholarship Offer in All Three Years of Evaluation**



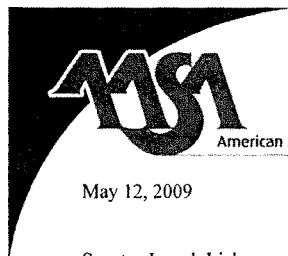
\*Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

SOURCE: Wolf et al., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years ...*, Figure 3-3.

**Table 3. NCEE Intervention Studies in Order of Significance of Achievement Impacts, May 2009**

NCEE Single Intervention Study	Overall Significant Impact	Partial or Subgroup Sig. Impact
1 Enhanced Reading Opportunities	positive (1 year)	some positive subgroups, some no effect
2 Closing the Gap Impacts on Reading Comprehension	positive (1 year)	some positive subgroups, some no effect
3 DC Opportunity Scholarship Program	positive (reading), no effect (math) (3 years)	some positive subgroups, some no effect
4 After-School Programs and Enhanced Academic Instruction	positive (math), no effect (reading) (1 year)	n/a
5 Student Mentoring Program	no effect	some positive subgroups, some no effect
6 Reading First	no effect (3 years)	improvements in student decoding skills
7 Classroom Literacy Interventions and Outcomes in Even Start	no effect (literacy measures)	improvements in parenting skills and children's social skills
8 Teacher Certification Routes	no effect	n/a
9 Comprehensive Elementary Teacher Induction	no effect (student achievement, teachers' practices, or teacher retention rates)	n/a
10 Professional Development Interventions for Early Reading	no effect (test scores)	no subgroup effects
11 Impact of Selective Supplemental Curricula on Reading Comprehension	3 no effect, 1 negative (1 year)	some negative subgroups, some no effect
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>4 positive, 9 no effect, 1 neg.</b>	

SOURCE: Calculated from review of the most recent evaluation reports where interventions were compared to a control group (see <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/>). Evaluations that merely compared interventions to each other are excluded.



American Association of School Administrators

May 12, 2009

Senator Joseph Lieberman  
Chairman  
Committee on Homeland Security  
and Governmental Affairs  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Susan Collins  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Homeland Security  
and Governmental Affairs  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Lieberman and Ranking Member Collins:

On behalf of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), we urge you oppose private school vouchers and allow for the expiration of the DC private school voucher program. In a time when every federal dollar matters and funding for critical public school funding such as Title I is under threat, now is not the time to continue the diversion of scarce taxpayer dollars to private schools.

A recent Institute of Education Sciences evaluation of the private school vouchers in the District of Columbia found no academic difference for the target population of students in English or math, students who originally attended schools failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress. Additionally there was no difference for boys in either English or math regardless of the AYP status of their original public school. It is clear, after an independent government evaluation, that the pilot program in DC has not demonstrated results and therefore should not be continued.

Private schools are not held to the same accountability standards as public schools. They are not required to have the same level of transparency and reporting to the public. In addition, private schools are not subject to the requirements of No Child Left Behind or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. As Congressional expectations of public school districts continue to rise, it is inequitable to not have the same expectations for private schools receiving federal dollars.

Vouchers are poor public policy, inherently flawed in permitting the inequalities found in the private markets, lacking public oversight, and leaving the choice of which students are admitted to the schools not the parents. Beyond being poor public policy, they lack political viability, losing by a margin of two-to-one in 12 elections over a 36 year period, and create an unsustainable increase in federal, state and local taxes.

With limited federal dollars we must invest available funding into the public school district that help a larger percentage of children. It is the children are left behind by vouchers who are at the greatest risk. Scarce taxpayer dollars should be focused on interventions to improve education for all students, rather than diverting funds to let a select few out of the public system.

Once again, we urge you to focus on the education that affects the majority of school children and no longer continue sending taxpayer dollars to private schools through the D.C. private school voucher expired pilot program. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Mary Kusler'.

Mary Kusler  
Assistant Director, Advocacy & Policy





**Written Testimony of the  
American Association of University Women**

before the

**United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs**

Hearing on

**“The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Preserving School Choice for All”**

**May 13, 2009**

Chairman Lieberman and members of the Committee thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the hearing “The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Preserving School Choice for All”

The American Association of University Women is a membership organization founded in 1881 with approximately 100,000 members and 1300 branches nationwide. AAUW has a proud 127-year history of breaking through barriers for women and girls and has always been a strong supporter of public education. Today, AAUW continues its mission through education, research, and advocacy.

The American Association of University Women stands firmly by the belief that the country should provide an excellent education for all children, not private school vouchers for a few. AAUW believes a strong, free public education system is the foundation of a democratic society, and has long opposed diverting public funds to private or religious elementary and secondary schools. The 1937 AAUW legislative program called for “free public instruction of high quality available to all, since popular education is the basis for freedom and justice,” and in 1955 stated “universal education is basic to the preservation of our form of government and to the well-being of our society.” Today, AAUW’s 2007-2009 Public Policy Program clearly states AAUW’s “...opposition to the use of public funds for nonpublic elementary and secondary education.”<sup>1</sup>

While AAUW supports innovative techniques to improve America’s schools, we believe voucher proposals fly in the face of our nation’s commitment to public education. AAUW does not oppose public school choice programs, which allow students to choose a public school in their school district. However, in many areas of the country the notion of “private school choice” is misleading because there are few, if any, private schools or because the only private schools are religiously affiliated and not the appropriate denomination for the family.

From AAUW's perspective, regardless of the constitutionality of certain voucher programs, such schemes are not sound education policy.

#### **AAUW Opposes Vouchers**

- Private and religious schools are not required to observe federal nondiscrimination laws, such as Title IX. In fact, voucher proposals often contain language specifically intended to circumvent civil rights laws, and many proponents insist voucher funding does not flow to the school but instead to the parent or student precisely to avoid any civil rights obligations. This specificity in language allows private institutions to discriminate on the basis of religion, gender, disability, and language proficiency. Further, private and religious schools can reject a student based on the school's own admissions criteria and discriminate against a student in access to classes, guidance counseling, extracurricular activities, and other aspects of education.
- Private and religious schools are not held to the same accountability and testing standards established in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Such schools do not have to hire "highly qualified" teachers, adhere to NCLB testing requirements and Adequate Yearly Progress, or disaggregate or publicly release student achievement results.
- Funding for NCLB is woefully inadequate, and the additional diversion of needed resources would further diminish public schools' ability to meet mandated accountability standards and address achievement gaps among students. President George W. Bush's budget for fiscal year 2009 allotted only \$24.7 billion for NCLB—nearly \$15 billion below the authorized amount. Over the course of its existence, NCLB has been underfunded to the tune of over \$85 billion.<sup>2</sup>
- Our country's public schools already face teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and increased accountability without adequate funding. Diverting critical resources from the school systems that educate 90 percent of America's students is not a fiscally sound investment.<sup>3</sup>
- Private and religious school voucher programs weaken the public school system by diverting these already scarce funds that could otherwise be used for needed teacher training, smaller class sizes, expanded support services, and improved facilities.
- Private school vouchers do not raise student achievement. A recent study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education compared the effectiveness of public schools to that of private institutions. After controlling for critical demographic factors (parents' income, education level, number of books in household), NCES found that public schools perform as well as, and even better in a few instances, than private schools.<sup>4</sup> A 2001 GAO study confirmed that the official evaluations of Cleveland's and Milwaukee's voucher programs found no differences in the achievement of voucher students compared to public school students, despite built-in applicant screening advantages for private schools.<sup>5</sup>

- Vouchers are taxpayers' dollars spent according to the policies of a private school board—not the decisions of a democratically elected and publicly accessible school board. Private and religious schools are not required to meet basic accountability provisions, such as open meetings and records laws, or to publicly release test scores, dropout rates, and other basic information. Because private schools are not accountable to the public at large, taxpayers lose public oversight for the expenditure of their tax dollars.
- Vouchers disproportionately help families with children already in private schools or those who have never attended public schools. At the inception of the Cleveland "Scholarship and Tutoring Program," 39 percent of students used their vouchers to continue their attendance in private or religious schools, and another 40 percent were attending school for the first time.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Voucher Proposals Unpopular in Public Opinion Polls and Ballot Initiatives**

- A 2001 poll conducted by the National School Boards Association and Zogby International revealed that voters preferred strategies to invest in public education like reducing class size (27 percent), improving teacher quality (27 percent), and increasing teacher training (23 percent) over voucher schemes (13 percent).<sup>7</sup>
- A 2006 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll found that 71 percent of Americans would prefer improving existing public schools over "finding an alternative to the existing public school system."<sup>8</sup>
- In November 2007, Utah voters rejected a voucher proposal that would have made vouchers available to all students. This marked 11 out of 11 tries that voucher state ballot initiatives have been decisively rejected by voters.<sup>9</sup> In most cases, the \$3,000 voucher would not cover even half of private school tuition which is estimated to be as much as \$8,000 annually. The initiative was defeated by a 25 percentage point margin with every county in the state voting against the voucher proposal.<sup>10</sup>

#### **District of Columbia School Voucher Program**

In 2003, a private school voucher program was created for the District of Columbia school system; it was intended as a five-year pilot research project scheduled to expire in 2008. This represents the first time in history that federal dollars have been used to fund private school vouchers. In the 109th Congress, several attempts to expand the program were proposed. While many of these attempts were thwarted, Congress did approve expanding eligibility for families already enrolled for the first two years of the program from 185 percent of the federal poverty level to 300 percent of FPL, turning what was pitched as a program to subsidize tuition for low-income families into a program that funds private education for middle-class families that often could afford the tuition anyway. With these precedents laid, voucher proponents have been emboldened to further divert taxpayer dollars to pay for private education. The program, which currently receives \$14 million, provides vouchers of up to \$7,500 a piece to about 1,700 students.

While implemented, the District of Columbia private school voucher “pilot” program has not performed in the ways the law was intended. A 2005 report found that fewer than 75 of the more than 1,300 students who received vouchers came from public schools that were determined to be most in need of improvement by federal law.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, more than 200 students who received vouchers were already enrolled in private schools. The unfortunate irony is that the number of students already in private schools receiving vouchers is almost three times the number of students coming from schools in need of improvement—the students who were purportedly the target of the program.<sup>12</sup>

Although the program was scheduled to end in 2008, the FY2009 Omnibus Appropriations bill included one additional year of funding for the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program and language to bring the program to an appropriate end. The language states that no additional funding will be provided without reauthorization of the program. This language requires a comprehensive look at the voucher program before any future funding is considered and puts DC families on notice that the future of the program is in question.

While AAUW’s general concerns about vouchers as discussed above apply to this program, we are especially troubled that most of the private schools that receive funding under the program do not have to follow Title IX. Title IX is the federal civil rights law prohibiting sex-discrimination in education programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance. The only private schools in the program that have to comply with Title IX are schools that receive federal money in addition to the voucher funding. While commonly known for creating opportunities for women and girls in athletics, Title IX affects all areas of education. It has made it possible for women to pursue careers as lawyers, doctors, mechanics, scientists, and professional athletes. Because schools that participate in this voucher program are exempt from Title IX, they can discriminate based on gender. This means schools can base admissions decisions on gender, limit opportunities for girls to play athletics, and base curriculum on outdated gender stereotypes. By exempting schools under this program from Title IX, the voucher program creates an environment that is not only ripe for gender discrimination, but has no protections in place should that discrimination occur.

In addition to civil rights concerns, the DC voucher program has not been shown to improve academic achievement. In April 2009, the Department of Education released a new report which found no improvement in academic achievement for those students receiving vouchers from public schools in need of improvement – the target audience of the voucher program.<sup>13</sup> An earlier report from June 2008 found that “after 2 years, there was no statistically significant difference in test scores in general between students who were offered an OSP [Opportunity Scholarship Program] scholarship and students who were not offered a scholarship.” In addition, while “the Program had a positive impact on overall parent satisfaction and parent perceptions of school safety ... [s]tudents had a different view of their schools than did their parents.” Overall, student satisfaction was unaffected by the voucher program.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, a November 2007 GAO report revealed numerous problems with the District of Columbia voucher program, including a lack of detailed fiscal policies and not adhering to procedures for making scholarship payments. The report also found that many of the participating schools conducted classes in unsuitable learning environments taught by teachers

lacking bachelor's degrees. In many cases, parents were not informed of these deficiencies.<sup>15</sup>

AAUW will continue to urge Congress and the Obama Administration to end the DC voucher program – a program which does not work and has already expired. AAUW believes the appropriate strategy for improving our nation's schools is to direct resources toward improving public schools, rather than diverting public funds into private institutions.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

<sup>1</sup> American Association of University Women. (August 2007). *2007-09 AAUW Public Policy Program*. Retrieved December 6, 2007, from [http://www.aauw.org/advocacy/issue\\_advocacy/upload/2007-09-PPP-brochure.pdf](http://www.aauw.org/advocacy/issue_advocacy/upload/2007-09-PPP-brochure.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> National Education Association. (February 4, 2008). *Funding Gap: No Child Left Behind*. Retrieved April 27, 2009, from <http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/fundinggap.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *The Condition of Education 2007*. Retrieved December 4, 2007, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007064.pdf>. The 90 percent statistic is derived from this table, which shows total private school enrollment at 9.7 percent.

<sup>4</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. (July 2006). *Comparing Private Schools and Public Schools Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling*. Retrieved December 4, 2007, from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2006461.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Government Accounting Office. (August 2001). *School Vouchers: Publicly Funded Programs in Cleveland and Milwaukee*. GAO-01-914 Retrieved December 5, 2007, from <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d01914.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Schiller, Zach and Policy Matters Ohio. (September 2001). *Cleveland School Vouchers: Where the Students Come From*. Retrieved December 5, 2007, from <http://www.policymattersohio.org/voucherintro.html>.

<sup>7</sup> National School Board Association/Zogby International Poll. (September 25, 2001). *School Vouchers: What the Public Thinks and Why*. Retrieved December 5, 2007, from <http://www.nsba.org/MainMenu/Advocacy/FederalLaws/SchoolVouchers/VoucherStrategyCenter/NSBAAdvocacyToolsonVouchers/NSBANationalpollonschoolvouchers.aspx>.

<sup>8</sup> Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll. (September 2006). *The 38th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll on the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Schools*. Retrieved December 5, 2007, from <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0609pol.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> National School Boards Association. (November 7, 2007). *Utah Voters' Defeat School Vouchers*. Retrieved January 2, 2008, from [http://vocuspri.vocus.com/vocuspr30/Newsroom/Query.aspx?SiteName=NSBANew&Entity=PRAsset&SF\\_PRAssetID\\_EQ=108422&XSL=PressRelease&Cache=False](http://vocuspri.vocus.com/vocuspr30/Newsroom/Query.aspx?SiteName=NSBANew&Entity=PRAsset&SF_PRAssetID_EQ=108422&XSL=PressRelease&Cache=False).

<sup>10</sup> Crawford, Grigs. (November 7, 2007). *Taxes, Stem Cell Funding, School Vouchers Rebuffed in Ballot Measure Voting*. Retrieved December 5, 2007 from <http://www.cqpolitics.com/wmspage.cfm?parm1=5&docID=news-000002623685>.

<sup>11</sup> People for the American Way Foundation. (February 2005). *Flaws and Failings: A Preliminary Look at the Problems Already Encountered in the Implementation of the District of Columbia's New Federally Mandated School Voucher Program*. Retrieved December 5, 2007, from [http://site.pfaw.org/site/PageServer?pagename=report\\_flaws\\_and\\_failings](http://site.pfaw.org/site/PageServer?pagename=report_flaws_and_failings).

<sup>12</sup> People for the American Way Foundation. (February 2005). *Flaws and Failings: A Preliminary Look at the Problems Already Encountered in the Implementation of the District of Columbia's New Federally Mandated School Voucher Program*. Retrieved December 5, 2007, from [http://site.pfaw.org/site/PageServer?pagename=report\\_flaws\\_and\\_failings](http://site.pfaw.org/site/PageServer?pagename=report_flaws_and_failings).

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Statistics. (April 2009). *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impact After Three Years*. Retrieved April 3, 2009 from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20094050/pdf/20094050.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Statistics. (June 2008). *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Two Years Executive Summary*. Retrieved June 16, 2008 from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pdf/20084024.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Government Accounting Office. (November 2007). *District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Additional Politics and Procedures Would Improve Internal Controls and Program Operations*. GAO-08-9 Retrieved December 5, 2007, from <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d089.pdf>.



ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL

Enabling Christian

Educators and Schools

Worldwide

**REVEREND JOHN HOLMES, Ed. D., DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS:  
ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL  
WRITTEN COMMENTS SUBMITTED AFTER THE MAY 13<sup>TH</sup>, 2009 HEARING:  
"THE D.C. OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM:  
PRESERVING SCHOOL CHOICE FOR ALL"  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
AND GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS**

Mr. Chairman and Senators,

Thank you for holding the SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS hearing which insightfully revealed the successes of the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program on May 13.

The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), which has member schools in all fifty states, Puerto Rico, and DC plus evangelical schools in 105 nations--representing over 1.1 million students--has been involved in the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program since its inception. Six ACSI member schools in Northeast and Southeast Washington have made sacrificial efforts to improve the academic and spiritual lives of DCOSP students, who now have hope and reasons to succeed academically.

Several of these ACSI-member schools lose money by accepting scholarship students with only \$7,500 provided per child. This amount is approximately half of the annual cost per child of students attending the DC Public School system. Our association has chosen to help these schools by providing curricula for free (or at cost) plus providing experts to train the teaching staffs in working more effectively with students who are academically and socially below grade level. We view our "losing money" efforts as an investment in urban American schools, as ACSI has done in other major cities. As a nonprofit entity we have been hurt financially by the recent extreme economic downturn. Many of our ACSI leaders have willingly accepted cuts in pay and benefits so that we can continue to help needy children. In spite of these realities, we are thankful to God for the open doors of service that we have here in the District of Columbia.

We urge you not to close the DCOSP availability to undereducated children in the District. Please help private and religious schools of DC keep their doors open, while educating DCOSP participants. Dr. Vernard Gant, ACSI's Director of Urban School Services, notes the following for urban school children, not just DCOSP recipients:

- The tuition the family pays does not cover the costs of educating the child.
- The families cannot afford the real costs of educating the child.
- Under-resourced and undereducated children require significantly more resources.

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- The [ACSI-member] schools cannot effectively educate under-resourced children without having adequate resources to do so.

Dr. Gant continues: "The balance of the real cost of education is usually borne by the staff as they settle for lower compensation and benefits. Even having teachers work for below their market value, however, does not afford the school the necessary resources to effectively educate under-resourced and undereducated learners....Parents ought to be allowed to place their children in schools that best serve them," via funds provided by government tax dollars following the children to the school of their family's choice. "That is true educational freedom, and it holds out the greatest chance of addressing the problems plaguing urban America."

ACSI stands ready, along with other private and religious member-school organizations that belong to the Council for American Private Education, to speak with compassion, care and accuracy regarding the DCOS program and its effects on children in the urban core. Please know that these students have been helped in more ways than just math and reading proficiencies. In many cases, their view of the world has been expanded and humanized. Their hopes and dreams have become possibilities.

We encourage your committee to carefully consider the realities of improvement of the children who were totally new to very different types of school settings. In spite of difficult circumstances, we are so glad that (1) the reading scores are significantly higher, (2) that the parents want their children to continue in these schools and (3) that the DCOS program scholars' families have found the schools to be safer environments for learning. There are also benefits that come which cannot be scored by testing, such as parental statements about how these private/religious schools "truly care about my child/ren."

The compromise proposed by President Obama's administration that would not allow any further involvement of new students is inadequate. Please find a way to keep this experimental program going—both for the good of the DCOS participants and the competition that helps cause all schools to become more effective.

Respectfully submitted,  
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**STATEMENT OF  
THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS  
ON THE D.C. OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

**SUBMITTED TO  
THE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
FOR THE HEARING RECORD OF  
MAY 13, 2009**

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) appreciates the opportunity to share its views on the "Opportunity Scholarship Program" in Washington, D.C. Our national president, Randi Weingarten, received an invitation to testify late Friday afternoon but was unable to participate given the short notice and previous commitments.

The AFT, on behalf of its more than 1.4 million members, strongly opposes reauthorization of the expired private school voucher pilot program. This position, while specific to the program at hand, is consistent with a core principle: Taxpayer funds should be used to support our nation's public schools. Private schools, which are ancillary to the public school system, should not be supported with public funds. This position is not new, nor is the decades-long discussion about the viability and suitability of vouchers. We believe that government's time and energy would be better spent focusing on strengthening and improving the public schools that are its responsibility. Instead of spending public dollars on vouchers for some students, funds should be invested in public school programs that have been proven to work, and that will help ensure all students receive a rich, rigorous education that prepares them for college or the



workforce after high school. These proven programs include lowering class sizes to allow teachers to spend more time with individual students, adopting reading programs with a record of effectiveness, offering after-school programs for students, making available wraparound services to meet students' noninstructional needs, and providing high-quality early childhood education. In addition, school buildings need to be repaired and modernized so children have access to technology and can learn in a safe, healthy and comfortable environment.

The D.C. voucher program, like other private school voucher plans, is a flawed policy that lacks accountability, and diverts attention and resources from efforts to improve our public schools.

The program was established as a five-year experimental pilot that would expire at the end of the last fiscal year. The fiscal year 2009 omnibus appropriations bill provided one additional year of funding, but specified that no further funds would be provided unless the program is reauthorized by Congress and approved by the D.C. city council. We believe that an objective examination of the program's track record will reveal its flaws and ineffectiveness, and will demonstrate that there is no justification for its reauthorization. Several federal reports released in 2007, 2008 and 2009 have clearly documented the problems with the program and its lack of effectiveness.

According to three congressionally mandated evaluation reports, vouchers have not resulted in increased achievement for the students formerly attending schools in need of

improvement—the students whom the program was primarily intended to assist. The 2007 and 2008 reports revealed no statistically significant differences overall in reading or math between D.C. private school voucher students and their peers attending D.C. public schools. The 2009 report likewise found no overall difference in math scores. While there was some improvement in reading scores, there was no significant difference in reading for students coming from schools in need of improvement or students who entered the program in the lower third of test score distribution.

The evaluations also found that the voucher program had no impact on student motivation and engagement, on students' satisfaction with their school, or on whether students viewed their school as safe and orderly. Also, voucher students were less likely to have access to important services such as programs for English language learners, special programs for students with learning problems, counselors, tutors and after-school programs.

In addition, a number of accountability problems with the program were documented in a report issued by the U.S. Government Accountability Office in 2007. According to the report, for example, students from schools in need of improvement (the group given priority in the statute) were underrepresented in the program, and federal tax dollars were spent on tuition at private schools that did not charge tuition. Some participating schools employed teachers who lacked a bachelor's degree; some failed to meet basic requirements for operating legally in the District of Columbia.

The AFT believes it is clear that the evidence does not support reauthorization of the private school voucher program. We believe further that ignoring the clear evidence provided and reauthorizing a program that does not work would be unfair to the children who might be enrolled in the program and could, potentially, lead to circumstances not unlike the one in which some District students, through no fault of their own, have currently been placed.

We now have an opportunity in the District of Columbia to make a real difference in the city's public schools, where the majority of students are educated. Resources and attention should be focused on that goal rather than funding private school vouchers. Supporters of vouchers should—if they so desire—provide private funding for these programs. The federal government should not. Instead, taxpayer dollars should be used to fund, support and improve our nation's public school system.

May 12, 2009

Senator Joseph Lieberman  
Chairman  
Committee on Homeland Security  
and Governmental Affairs  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Susan Collins  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Homeland Security  
and Governmental Affairs  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

**RE: Oppose Reauthorization of the D.C. Voucher Program**

Dear Chairman Lieberman and Ranking Member Collins:

On behalf of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, representing over 120,000 members and supporters in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, **we write to express our opposition to reauthorization of the D.C. voucher program and to urge you to oppose reauthorization of the program at the May 13, 2009 hearing of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.** In addition to raising constitutional and civil rights concerns, the D.C. voucher program has simply proven ineffective and thus should not be extended. Indeed, extending the program would defy the lessons learned from the pilot-that vouchers do not improve the education of D.C. students.

The D.C. voucher program was established in 2003 (passing by just one vote in the U.S. House of Representatives) as a five-year pilot program slated to expire in 2008. The proposed FY2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act provides one additional year of funding for the program-already extending the bill one year beyond the original pilot period-for student transition purposes. In addition, the Act also required that Congress and the District of Columbia reauthorize the voucher program before funding would be extended in future years. This Committee, therefore, is now examining the program.

**The Pilot Voucher Program Has Failed to Improve Educational Opportunity**

During its five-year pilot, the voucher program has proven ineffective and, thus, should not be further funded by Congress. First, this voucher program has not improved student achievement. To the contrary, reports issued by the Department of Education in 2007, 2008, and 2009 all demonstrate that the target group of students (students from "schools in need of improvement") showed no improvement in reading or math achievement as compared to students attending D.C.

public schools.<sup>[1]</sup> These three studies also revealed that the voucher program had no effect on student safety, satisfaction, motivation, or engagement.<sup>[2]</sup> And, they revealed that many of the students in the voucher program were **less likely** to have access to key services-such as ESL programs, learning support and special needs programs, and counselors-than students who were not part of the program.<sup>[3]</sup>

A November 2007 GAO Report<sup>[4]</sup> was also critical of the D.C. voucher program. The study found that "accountability and internal control were inadequate."<sup>[5]</sup> For example, federal tax dollars were paid to private schools that did not even charge tuition and on schools that employed teachers who lacked bachelor's degrees.<sup>[6]</sup> The report also found that parents were given "incomplete," "inaccurate," and even "misleading" information about the private schools their children attended.<sup>[7]</sup> Furthermore, the study concluded that the voucher program has not met its goal of serving students in schools in need of improvement: less than one-quarter of the students offered vouchers under the program were from these schools.<sup>[8]</sup>

In addition to not improving the education of voucher students, the voucher program has taken money away from the D.C. public schools. Vouchers do not decrease the fixed education costs at public schools-such as building costs, libraries, and utilities. When vouchers take away funds that would ordinarily go to public school and send the money to private schools, they limit the capacity of public schools. Congress should increase its funding of the public schools rather than funneling taxpayer money to private institutions.

On all counts-improving achievement, using funds effectively, providing opportunities for students in schools in need of improvement, and improving public schools-the D.C. voucher program has failed. Accordingly, extending the program is unjustified.

#### **The Pilot Voucher Program Allows Government-Funded Discrimination**

Although the United States Supreme Court did approve the constitutionality of a school voucher program in Cleveland,<sup>[9]</sup> the D.C. voucher scheme differs from the Cleveland program in constitutionally significant ways. Unlike the Ohio voucher scheme, the D.C. scheme permits religious schools to discriminate on the basis of religion in hiring and on the basis of gender in admission.<sup>[10]</sup> A central principle of our constitutional order, however, is that "the Constitution does not permit the State to aid discrimination."<sup>[11]</sup>

In addition to raising constitutional concerns, federally subsidized religious discrimination raises significant public policy concerns. When funding any school, whether public or private, the government should not surrender the longstanding principle of equal treatment for all-all students should be treated the same regardless of sex and all teachers the same regardless of religion. Taxpayer money should not fund programs that harm the fundamental civil rights of students and teachers.

#### **The Pilot Voucher Program Provides an Incentive to Attend Religious Schools**

The D.C. program also is distinguishable from the Cleveland voucher scheme and proves constitutionally suspect because it provides an incentive to attend private religious schools. *Zelman* permitted the voucher scheme in Cleveland because it found that the program did not use financial incentives to skew students towards religious schools.<sup>[12]</sup> This is because any student choosing to accept a voucher was required to copay a portion of the private school tuition. (The Cleveland vouchers were capped at the either 75% or 90% of the school tuition (depending on the family income) or \$2,500, whichever was less.) Attending a private school (with a copay), therefore, would be more costly than attending a public school (for free). In fact, the Court concluded that there was a disincentive to go to a religious school because attending the secular public school would cost a family nothing, but attending a religious school would, in all cases, require a copay.<sup>[13]</sup> The D.C. scheme, however, does not require a copay. Thus, in some instances, students attend private religious schools at no additional cost because the \$7,500 voucher covers the *entire* tuition. Thus, D.C. parents can get a free religious education at taxpayer expense. Unlike the Cleveland program, therefore, there is no disincentive to attend the private religious school.

Furthermore, in *Zelman*, although a copay was required, the copay that schools could charge was capped for students below the poverty level. Thus, for those priority students, attending private religious schools would cost about the same as attending a private secular school even though religious schools are traditionally much less expensive than secular private schools. In D.C., there is no copay cap. For D.C. students accepting a voucher, therefore, there is an incentive to choose a religious private school over a secular private school. The \$7,500 voucher may cover tuition at a traditionally less expensive religious private school, but is unlikely to cover the tuition at a secular private school. Thus, attending a religious school will cost a parent less (with little or no copay) than attending a secular private school (with a large copay). The incentive to attend a religious school is highlighted by the fact that approximately 75% of all students in the program attend private religious schools.<sup>[14]</sup> Because the structure, unlike the structure in *Zelman*, sets up an incentive to attend religious schools, the program is constitutionally suspect.

There is no justification for reauthorizing this ineffective and constitutionally suspect trial voucher program. The federal government should be funding public schools rather than funneling taxpayer funds to private schools that lack accountability, religious liberty, and civil rights standards. Accordingly, we ask you to oppose reauthorization of the program.

If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at (202) 466-3234.

Sincerely,

Aaron Schuham  
Legislative Director

Maggie Garrett  
Assistant Legislative Director

<sup>[1]</sup> U.S. Dep't of Education, *Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years* (April 2009), [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20094050/pdf/20094050\\_1.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20094050/pdf/20094050_1.pdf); U.S. Dep't of Education, *Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Two Years* (June 2008), <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pdf/20084024.pdf>; U.S. Dep't of Education, *Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After One Year* (June 2007), <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pdf/20074009.pdf>.

<sup>[2]</sup> 2009 *U.S. Dep't of Ed. Report* at xxvi, xviii, 35, 40, 44-45, 49-50; 2008 *U.S. Dep't of Ed. Report* at 42-43, 50, & 57; & 2007 *U.S. Dep't of Ed. Report* at xix & 1-4.

<sup>[3]</sup> 2009 *U.S. Dep't of Ed. Report* at xxii, and 17; 2008 *U.S. Dep't of Ed. Report* at xvii, & 16; 2007 *U.S. Dep't of Ed. Report* at 21.

<sup>[4]</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program*, (Nov. 2007), <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d089.pdf>.

<sup>[5]</sup> *Id.* at 36.

<sup>[6]</sup> *Id.* at 22-33, 33, 34.

<sup>[7]</sup> *Id.* at 36.

<sup>[8]</sup> *Id.* at 23-24, 26, 28.

<sup>[9]</sup> *Zelman v. Harris*, 536 U.S. 639 (2002).

<sup>[10]</sup> Compare Ohio Rev. Code § 3313.976 (A)(6) with P.L. 108-199 Stat. 3 (2004); see also *Zelman*.

<sup>[11]</sup> *Norwood v. Harrison*, 413 U.S. 455, 465-66 (1973).

<sup>[12]</sup> *Zelman*, 536 U.S. at 653-54.

<sup>[13]</sup> *Id.*

<sup>[14]</sup> 2008 *US Dep't of Educ. Report* at 14.

**ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON**  
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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PREPAREDNESS, AND RESPONSE

Senator Joseph Lieberman  
706 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Joe,

Thank you again for our meeting on Friday. And thank you, especially, for your continuing dedication to our voting rights bill.

I am writing with a different request concerning your hearing planned for May 13<sup>th</sup>. I know that you promised this hearing, and I have no objection to such a hearing. I understand that you will hear from several voucher parents and their children. I am asking that you also allow at least one charter school witness and child to appear as well. I make this request for practical reasons.

As you are aware, P.L. 111-8 requires that specific conditions be met before further funding can be provided for private school vouchers in the District of Columbia, including authorization by Congress and by the D.C. City Council. It is almost certain that the Council, which strongly opposed the imposition of vouchers on the District, will continue to decline to authorize vouchers, the House authorizing committee said sometime ago in a written statement that it would not authorize continuation, and the Senate recently rejected an attempt to eliminate the conditions in P.L. 111-8. In addition, report language instructed the Chancellor to "promptly take steps to minimize potential disruption and ensure smooth transition for any students seeking enrollment in the public school system as a result of any changes made to the private scholarship program affecting periods after school year 2009."

Because I represent the District, I have been concerned that any transition minimizes disruption to the education and aspirations of these children and their parents to the greatest extent possible. When the Washington Scholarship Fund, which administers the vouchers, failed to inform parents of the five-year end point of the experiment, I requested that funding continue for an additional year (the forthcoming 2009-2010 school year), and that additional funds be provided to accommodate the transition. Minimally, it is prudent now for Congress and the District to consider steps if these children return to public schools, and to prepare for a smooth transition should that occur.

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The language, above, written by the Appropriations Committee, refers only to the "public school system." However, these children are also entitled to attend public charter schools. In the past, some of my voucher constituents, who visited me in my office, have told me that they applied for vouchers because they had been unable to find placement in charter schools because many have waiting lists. Especially in light of the choice of these parents for public school alternatives, some of them are likely to prefer charters to public schools, notwithstanding encouraging improvement in the D.C. public schools.

While much is known about D.C. public schools, there is very little information on the more recent growth of public charters in the District. Fully one-third of the District's children, chosen by lottery, attend D.C. charter schools, a citizen-created alternative public school network. Test results show often stunning educational improvement, far exceeding the performance of children in traditional D.C. public schools. (See the *Washington Post* investigation showing a large gap between District public and charter school children, December 15, 2008), while GAO reports have found no change in the academic performance of the children attending private schools. Further, between 2003 and 2009, the public charter high schools had a graduation rate that was 91%, more than twice the 43% rate for D.C. public schools.

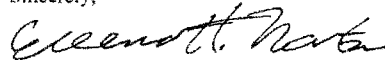
Although I have been impressed by the growing gap between public and charter school achievement statistics, I do not know enough to recommend specific parents or children, and I have not spoken with staff at the Public Charter School Board, the chartering and oversight authority. However, I believe that the Board would be a good source for the charter school witnesses I am requesting.

Whatever our respective views on vouchers, I believe you and I would agree that there must be alternatives to failing public schools. It takes nothing away from your own support of the voucher alternative to open your hearing to the other alternative available in the District as well.

I appreciate that you have designed a hearing without the usual pro and con witnesses for this controversial subject. In keeping with your usual fairness and graciousness, I know that you put the welfare and these children and their families above all else. It is in this spirit that I make this request for charter school witnesses.

Best personal regards.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Holmes Norton



ADRIAN M. FENTY  
MAYOR

May 11, 2009

The Honorable Joseph I. Lieberman  
Chairman  
Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs  
United States Senate  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Lieberman:

Thank you for your invitation to participate in a hearing regarding the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program. I appreciate your continued interest in matters that are vitally important to the residents of the District of Columbia.

The position of the Administration on the continuation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program is consistent with our position during the last two budget cycles – we support the three-sector approach initiated by the Williams Administration because in the past two years the District has made tremendous strides toward improving the educational experience of all students.

Accordingly, we do not support any measures that would reverse the three-sector approach or strategy. We further agree with President Obama's FY2010 Budget which recognizes that it would not be productive to disrupt the education of children who are presently enrolled in private schools through the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program.

Once again, thank you for your continued support of the District of Columbia. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me or Bridget Davis in my Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs.

Sincerely,

Adrian M. Fenty  
Mayor



UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME  
TIMOTHY R. SCULLY, C.S.C., DIRECTOR

May 11, 2009

The Honorable Joseph I. Lieberman  
Chair, Senate Homeland Security and  
Governmental Affairs Committee  
United States Senate  
706 Hart Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Ranking Member, Senate Homeland Security  
and Governmental Affairs Committee  
United States Senate  
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Collins,

I write today to express my strong support for the reauthorization of the Washington DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (the "OSP").

Enacted in 2004, the OSP is a publicly-funded K-12 scholarship initiative that presently grants more than 1,700 children from the District of Columbia the opportunity to attend schools of their families' choosing. Over the course of the last 4 years, the OSP has served thousands of DC's poorest children, granting them the educational opportunity that is their birthright.

As the committee knows, Congress recently inserted language into the 2009 omnibus spending bill, which was ultimately signed into law, that will effectively eliminate the OSP, and Secretary Duncan has taken the unprecedented action of refusing to admit more students to the program for the 2009-2010 school year despite Congress's explicit authorization of funds to continue the program through that year. The passage of this legislation and Secretary Duncan's actions mean that the families and neighbors of the 1,700 current scholarship recipients will never have the opportunity to enter a program that has served as a lifeline for some of DC's poorest families unless Congress and the DC City Council vote to reauthorize the program.

The value of the program is evident in the rigorous analysis of program outcomes demonstrated in a study commissioned by the Department of Education that was released just a few weeks ago. Using some of the most rigorous statistical modeling available, the research demonstrates statistically significant gains for students in the Opportunity Scholarship Program compared to their public school peers. Most notably, children receiving scholarships demonstrated the equivalent of 3.1 months of additional learning in reading. Moreover, the research shows unequivocally that parents of Opportunity Scholarship Program students are deeply satisfied with the program, viewing their schools of choice as safer and stronger. Parents of OSP students argue that their children are performing better in school, and they report that these scholarships have given their families an opportunity to break the cycle of poverty (see enclosed Appendix 1).

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Still, Secretary Duncan and a number of your Congressional colleagues have ignored the research and have implied that the OSP has been a failed experiment. As a direct result of their actions, some of the most at risk students in our nation's capital are moving ever closer to losing their first and only experience of educational opportunity.

My colleagues and I from the University of Notre Dame recognize this crisis as a simple and straightforward matter of social justice, and we are wholeheartedly committed to protecting the educational rights of these schoolchildren. For the past decade, the University of Notre Dame, through its Alliance for Catholic Education ("ACE"), has served as the nation's largest provider of teachers and principals for inner-city Catholic schools. Since 1993, the University has prepared more than 1,000 teachers and hundreds of principals to work in more than 100 of the poorest Catholic schools in the nation (see enclosed Appendix 2).

Our experience working with urban Catholic schools through ACE -- both in Washington, D.C. and throughout the nation, coupled with scholarship that the University has sponsored through its Center for Research on Educational Opportunity, has led us to an unassailable conclusion: the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program provides an educational lifeline to at-risk children and stands as one of the greatest signs of hope for K-12 educational reform. We know that any educational program that demonstrates the equivalent of 3.1 months of additional learning is far from a failed experiment; indeed, any program that demonstrates results of that magnitude should be continued, expanded and replicated.

As you know, hundreds of children benefiting from the OSP attend Washington, D.C. Catholic schools, and it is no surprise to us that the research findings regarding the OSP are consistent with three decades of research that tell us that Catholic schools are often the best providers of educational opportunity to poor and minority children. For example, students who attend Catholic schools are 42 percent more likely to graduate from high school and are two and a half times more likely to go to college than their peers in public schools. Dozens of other studies have demonstrated that poor and minority students—those whom sociologist Andrew Greeley called the "multiply disadvantaged"—tend to benefit most from the opportunity to attend Catholic schools (see enclosed Appendix 3).

Public outcry against the proposed termination of the OSP and the removal of these children from their schools of choice has been loud and continuous. This very week, thousands of parents, children, and educators gathered in Freedom Plaza to protest the expiration of this program. A petition with over 7,500 signatures was presented to Mayor Adrian Fenty in support of the continuation of the Opportunity Scholarship Program. The op-ed pages of all the major newspapers in the country have expressed disbelief and anger over the treatment of this program and the children and families it affects so intimately (see enclosed Appendix 4). While President Obama very recently indicated support for a gradual phasing out of the OSP rather than immediate termination, that is not a solution. The program must be reauthorized, and new children must be admitted to the OSP so that the program can continue its proven, valuable work with students in Washington.

It is important for the Senate Committee to note that 99% of the students served by the OSP are underprivileged, minority children and to recall that for the better part of the last century,

hundreds of thousands of low-income families fought desperately to gain access to the K-12 schools that their white peers had the privilege to attend. Each time they tried, they found our government standing in the school doorway, denying them entrance because of the color of their skin. Then an ambitious young lawyer named Thurgood Marshall walked these children up to the Supreme Court; the legal sanction for segregation came to an end; and we had reason to believe in the promise of better days ahead for K-12 school children.

Unfortunately, in the decades since *Brown*, we have failed to live up to our promise to underprivileged, minority children. Today, we still see scores of children desperate to leave schools that have utterly failed them. And the government is still standing in the school doorways. Only now, the government tells the children that they aren't allowed *out*. We have essentially trapped these children in schools that completely fail them, and the only precondition of their imprisonment is poverty.

We at the University of Notre Dame believe that providing equal educational opportunities for poor children is the civil rights issue of this era, and that we as a nation have a moral imperative to afford at-risk children access to real educational opportunity. As a lifelong educator, I cannot stand idly by as partisan politics forcibly refuse to provide children in poverty access to schools that work, particularly when their assigned public schools have failed them so thoroughly and for so long. If this crisis continues on its present course, it would indeed be an historic moment, but for all the wrong reasons. It would represent the first time in the history of this great nation that a set of our most at-risk young citizens have been removed from the schools of their choice by a legislative fiat.

My colleagues and I urge you to lead the effort to revive the OSP through reauthorization and protect the children it serves from this grave and historic injustice. Please know that you are joined by Notre Dame's ACE Program, by the faculty and students on Notre Dame's campus, by tens of thousands of Notre Dame alumni nationwide, by millions of Catholic school families, and by countless additional Americans in steadfast commitment to ensuring that these children continue to receive the educational opportunity that is their birthright.

Yours devotedly in Notre Dame,



Rev. Timothy R. Scully, C.S.C.  
Director, Institute for Educational Initiatives  
Professor of Political Science

**Appendix 1**

**Executive Summary**

**Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts after three years**

Wolf, P., Gutmann, B., Puma, M., Kisida, B., Rizzo, L., Eissa, N., & Silverberg, M. (2009).  
*Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts after three years*  
(NCEE 2009-4051). Washington, DC: US Department of Education Institute of  
Educational Sciences.

# Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program

Impacts After Three Years

Executive Summary



# Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program

Impacts After Three Years

Executive Summary

March 2009

**Patrick Wolf**, Principal Investigator, University of Arkansas

**Babette Gutmann**, Project Director, Westat

**Michael Puma**, Chesapeake Research Associates

**Brian Kisida**, University of Arkansas

**Lou Rizzo**, Westat

**Nada Eissa**, Georgetown University

**Marsha Silverberg**, Project Officer, Institute of Education Sciences

NCEE 2009-4051  
U.S. Department of Education





**U.S. Department of Education**

Arne Duncan

*Secretary***Institute of Education Sciences**

Sue Betka

*Acting Director***National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance**

Phoebe Cottingham

*Commissioner***March 2009**

This report was prepared for the Institute of Education Sciences under Contract No. ED-04-CO-0126. The project officer was Marsha Silverberg in the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

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## Acknowledgments

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This report is the fifth of a series of annual reports mandated by Congress. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of a significant number of individuals in its preparation and production.

Staff from the Washington Scholarship Fund provided helpful information and have always been available to answer our questions.

We are also fortunate to have the advice of an Expert Advisory Panel. Members include: Julian Betts, University of California, San Diego; Thomas Cook, Northwestern University; Jeffrey Henig, Columbia University; William Howell, University of Chicago; Guido Imbens, Harvard University; Rebecca Maynard, University of Pennsylvania; and Larry Orr, formerly of Abt Associates and now an independent consultant.

The challenging task of assembling the analysis files was capably undertaken by Yong Lee, Quinn Yang, and Yu Cao at Westat. The management and conduct of the data collection was performed by Juanita Lucas-McLean and Sabria Hardy of Westat. Expert editorial and production assistance was provided by Evarilla Cover and Saunders Freeland of Westat. Jeffery Dean of the University of Arkansas ably assisted with the intermediate outcomes analysis and the drafting of chapter 4 and appendix F.

## Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interests<sup>1</sup>

---

The research team for this evaluation consists of a prime contractor, Westat, and two subcontractors, Patrick Wolf (formerly at Georgetown University) and his team at the University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform and Michael Puma of Chesapeake Research Associates (CRA). None of these organizations or their key staff has financial interests that could be affected by findings from the evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP). No one on the seven-member Technical Working Group convened by the research team once a year to provide advice and guidance has financial interests that could be affected by findings from the evaluation.

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<sup>1</sup> Contractors carrying out research and evaluation projects for IES frequently need to obtain expert advice and technical assistance from individuals and entities whose other professional work may not be entirely independent of or separable from the particular tasks they are carrying out for the IES contractor. Contractors endeavor not to put such individuals or entities in positions in which they could bias the analysis and reporting of results, and their potential conflicts of interest are disclosed.

## Executive Summary

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The *District of Columbia School Choice Incentive Act of 2003*, passed by Congress in January 2004, established the first federally funded, private school voucher program in the United States. As part of this legislation, Congress mandated a rigorous evaluation of the impacts of the Program, now called the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP). This report presents findings from the evaluation of the impacts 3 years after families who applied were given the option to move from a public school to a participating private school of their choice.

The evaluation is based on a randomized controlled trial design that compares the outcomes of eligible applicants randomly assigned to receive (treatment group) or not receive (control group) a scholarship through a series of lotteries. The main findings of the evaluation so far include:

- **After 3 years, there was a statistically significant positive impact on reading test scores, but not math test scores.** Overall, those offered a scholarship were performing at statistically higher levels in reading—equivalent to 3.1 months of additional learning—but at similar levels in math compared to students not offered a scholarship (table 3). Analysis in prior years indicated no significant impacts overall on either reading or math achievement.
- **The OSP had a positive impact overall on parents' reports of school satisfaction and safety (figures 3 and 4), but not on students' reports (figures 3 and 4).** Parents were more satisfied with their child's school (as measured by the percentage giving the school a grade of A or B) and viewed their child's school as safer and more orderly if the child was offered a scholarship. Students had a different view of their schools than did their parents. Reports of safety and school climate were comparable for students in the treatment and control groups. Overall, student satisfaction was unaffected by the Program.
- **This same pattern of findings holds when the analysis is conducted to determine the impact of *using* a scholarship rather than being *offered* a scholarship.** Fourteen percent of students in our impact sample who were randomly assigned by lottery to receive a scholarship and who responded to year 3 data collection chose not to use their scholarship at any point over the 3-year period after applying to the Program.<sup>1</sup> We use a common statistical technique to take those "never users" into account; it assumes that the students had zero impact from the OSP, but it does not change the statistical significance of the original impact estimates. Therefore, the positive impacts on reading achievement, parent views of school safety and climate, and parent views of

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<sup>1</sup> This 14 percent "never user" rate among year 3 respondents in the impact sample differs from the 25 percent "never user" rate for the impact sample as a whole (Figure 1) because scholarship "never users" in the impact sample responded to year 3 data collection events at lower rates than did scholarship "ever users."

satisfaction all increase in size, and there remains no impact on math achievement and no overall impact on students' perceptions of school safety and climate or satisfaction from using an OSP scholarship.

- **The OSP improved reading achievement for 5 of the 10 subgroups examined.<sup>2</sup>** Being offered or using a scholarship led to higher reading test scores for participants who applied from schools that were not classified as "schools in need of improvement" (non-SINI). There were also positive impacts for students who applied to the Program with relatively higher levels of academic performance, female students, students entering grades K-8 at the time of application, and students from the first cohort of applicants. These impacts translate into 1/3 to 2 years of additional learning growth. However, the positive subgroup reading impacts for female students and the first cohort of applicants should be interpreted with caution, as reliability tests suggest that they could be false discoveries.
- **No achievement impacts were observed for five other subgroups of students, including those who entered the Program with relative academic disadvantage.** Subgroups of students who applied from SINI schools (designated by Congress as the highest priority group for the Program) or were in the lower third of the test score distribution among applicants did not demonstrate significant impacts on reading test scores if they were offered or used a scholarship. In addition, male students, those entering high school grades upon application, and those in application cohort 2 showed no significant impacts in either reading or math after 3 years.

### DC Opportunity Scholarship Program

The purpose of the new scholarship program was to provide low-income residents, particularly those whose children attend schools in need of improvement or corrective action under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, with "expanded opportunities to attend higher performing schools in the District of Columbia" (Sec. 303). The scholarship, worth up to \$7,500, could be used to cover the costs of tuition, school fees, and transportation to a participating private school. The statute also prescribed how scholarships would be awarded: (1) in a given year, if there are more eligible applicants than available scholarships or open slots in private schools, scholarships are to be awarded by random selection (e.g., by lottery), and (2) priority for scholarships is given first to students attending SINI public schools and then to families that lack the resources to take advantage of school choice options.

<sup>2</sup> The subgroups that are analyzed in this study were designated prior to the collection and analysis of data and are of particular policy interest based on the Program statute and education policy literature. The subgroups are: (1) whether students attended a school designated as in need of improvement (SINI) under the *No Child Left Behind Act* prior to application to the Program—students were either attending a SINI-ever or SINI-never school; (2) whether students were relatively lower performing or relatively higher performing at baseline—students were either in the bottom one-third or the top two-thirds of the test score distribution; (3) student gender; (4) whether students were entering grades K-8 or 9-12 at the time of application; and (5) whether students were in application cohort 1 (applied in 2004) or application cohort 2 (applied in 2005).

The Program is operated by the Washington Scholarship Fund (WSF). To date, there have been five rounds of applications to the OSP (table 1). Applicants in spring 2004 (cohort 1) and spring 2005 (cohort 2) represent the majority of Program applicants; the evaluation sample was drawn from these two groups.<sup>3</sup> A smaller number of applicants in spring 2006 (cohort 3), spring 2007 (cohort 4), and spring 2008 (cohort 5) were recruited and enrolled by WSF in order to keep the Program operating at capacity each year.

**Table 1. OSP Applicants by Program Status, Cohorts 1 Through 5, Years 2004-2008**

	Cohort 1 (Spring 2004)	Cohort 2 (Spring 2005)	Total Cohort 1 and Cohort 2	Cohort 3 (Spring 2006), Cohort 4 (Spring 2007), and Cohort 5 (Spring 2008)	Total, All Cohorts
Applicants	2,692	3,126	5,818	2,034	7,852
Eligible applicants	1,848	2,199	4,047	1,284	5,331
Scholarship awardees	1,366	1,088	2,454	1,284	3,738
Scholarship users in initial year of receipt	1,027	797	1,824	1,057	2,881
Scholarship users fall 2005	919	797	1,716	NA	1,716
Scholarship users fall 2006	788	684	1,472	333	1,805
Scholarship users fall 2007	678	581	1,259	671	1,930
Scholarship users fall 2008	496	411	909	807	1,714

NOTES: Because most participating private schools closed their enrollments by mid-spring, applicants generally had their eligibility determined based on income and residency, and the lotteries were held prior to the administration of baseline tests. Therefore, baseline testing was not a condition of eligibility for most applicants. The exception was applicants entering the highly oversubscribed grades 6-12 in cohort 2. Those who did not participate in baseline testing were deemed ineligible for the lottery and were not included in the eligible applicant figure presented above, though they were counted in the applicant total. In other words, the cohort 2 applicants in grades 6-12 had to satisfy income, residency, and baseline testing requirements before they were designated eligible applicants and entered in the lottery.

The initial year of scholarship receipt was fall 2004 for cohort 1, fall 2005 for cohort 2, fall 2006 for cohort 3, fall 2007 for cohort 4, and fall 2008 for cohort 5.

SOURCES: OSP applications and WSF's enrollment and payment files.

### Mandated Evaluation of the OSP

In addition to establishing the OSP, Congress mandated an independent evaluation of it be conducted, with annual reports on the progress of the study. The legislation indicated the evaluation should analyze the effects of the Program on various academic and nonacademic outcomes of concern to policymakers and use "... the strongest possible research design for determining the effectiveness" of the

<sup>3</sup> Descriptive reports on each of the first 2 years of implementation and cohorts of students have been previously prepared and released (Wolf, Gutmann, Eissa, Puma, and Silverberg 2005; Wolf, Gutmann, Puma, and Silverberg 2006) and are available on the Institute of Education Sciences' website at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee>.

Program. The current evaluation was developed to be responsive to these requirements. In particular, the foundation of the evaluation is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) that compares outcomes of eligible applicants (students and their parents) randomly assigned to receive or not receive a scholarship. This decision was based on the mandate to use rigorous evaluation methods, the expectation that there would be more applicants than funds and private school spaces available, and the statute's requirement that random selection be the vehicle for determining who receives a scholarship. An RCT design is widely viewed as the best method for identifying the independent effect of programs on subsequent outcomes (e.g., Boruch, de Moya, and Snyder 2002, p. 74). Random assignment has been used by researchers conducting impact evaluations of other scholarship programs in Charlotte, NC; New York City; Dayton, OH; and Washington, DC (Greene 2001; Howell et al. 2002; Mayer et al. 2002).

The recruitment, application, and lottery process conducted by WSF with guidance from the evaluation team created the foundation for the evaluation's randomized trial and determined the group of students for whom impacts of the Program are analyzed in this report. Because the goal of the evaluation was to assess both the short-term and longer term impacts of the Program, it was necessary to focus the study on early applicants to the Program (cohorts 1 and 2) whose outcomes could be tracked over at least 3 years during the evaluation period. During the first 2 years of recruitment, WSF received applications from 5,818 students. Of these, approximately 70 percent (4,047 of 5,818) were eligible to enter the Program (table 1). Of the total pool of eligible applicants, 2,308 students who were attending public schools or were rising kindergarteners entered lotteries (492 in cohort 1; 1,816 in cohort 2), resulting in 1,387 students assigned to the treatment condition and 921 assigned to the control condition. These students constitute the evaluation's impact analysis sample and represent three-quarters of all students in cohorts 1 and 2 who were not already attending a private school when they applied to the OSP.

Data are collected from the impact sample each year, starting with the spring in which students applied to the OSP (baseline) and each spring thereafter. These data include assessments of student achievement in reading and mathematics using the Stanford Achievement Test version 9 (SAT-9),<sup>4</sup> surveys of parents, and surveys of students in grade 4 and above—administered by the evaluation team in central District of Columbia (DC) locations on Saturdays or weekday evenings because neither the public nor private schools would allow data collection on their campuses during the school day. In addition, the evaluation surveys all DC public and private schools each spring in order to address the statute's interest in understanding how the schools are responding to the OSP.

<sup>4</sup> *Stanford Abbreviated Achievement Test (Form S)*, Ninth Edition. San Antonio, TX: Harcourt Educational Measurement, Harcourt Assessment, Inc., 1997.

### Participation in the OSP

In interpreting the impacts of the OSP, it is useful to examine the characteristics of the private schools that participate in the Program and the extent to which students offered scholarships (the treatment group) moved into and out of them during the first 3 years.

#### *School Participation*

The private schools participating in the OSP represent the choice set available to parents whose children received scholarships. That group of schools had mostly stabilized by the 2005-06 school year. The schools that offered the most slots to OSP students, and in which OSP students and the impact sample's treatment group were clustered, have characteristics that differed somewhat from the average participating OSP school. Although 56 percent of all participating schools were faith-based (39 percent were part of the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington), 82 percent of the treatment group attended a faith-based school, with 59 percent of them attending the 22 participating Catholic parochial schools (table 2). Twenty-two percent of treatment group students were attending a school that charged tuition above the statutory cap of \$7,500 during their third year in the Program (table 2) even though 38 percent and 46 percent of participating schools charged tuitions above that cap in 2006-07 and 2007-08, respectively.

**Table 2. Features of Participating OSP Private Schools Attended by the Treatment Group in Year 3**

Characteristic	Weighted Mean	Highest	Lowest	Valid <i>N</i>
Archdiocesan Catholic schools (percent of treatment students attending)	59.2	NA	NA	66
Other faith-based schools (percent of treatment students attending)	22.5	NA	NA	66
Charging over \$7,500 tuition (percent of treatment students attending)	22.3	NA	NA	48
Tuition	\$6,620	\$29,902	\$3,600	48
Enrollment	260.5	1,072	10	43
Student <i>N</i>	701			

NOTES: "Valid *N*" refers to the number of schools for which information on a particular characteristic was available. When a tuition range was provided, the mid-point of the range was used. The weighted mean was generated by associating each student with the characteristics of the school he/she was attending, and then computing the average of these student-level characteristics.

SOURCE: OSP School Directory information, 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08, Washington Scholarship Fund.

While the characteristics of the participating private schools are important considerations for parents, in many respects it is how the schools differ from the public school options available to them that matters most. In the third year after applying to the OSP, students in the treatment and control groups did



not differ significantly regarding the proportion attending schools that offered a separate library (88 vs. 91 percent), gyms (71 and 72 percent), and art programs (89 and 87 percent). There were the following statistically significant differences (at the .01 level):

- Students in the treatment group were more likely than those in the control group to attend schools with a computer lab (96 vs. 87 percent), with special programs for advanced learners (48 vs. 32 percent), and that offered a music program (89 vs. 82 percent).
- Students in the treatment group were less likely than the control group to attend a school with a cafeteria facility (79 vs. 88 percent) or a nurse's office (30 vs. 81 percent).
- Students in the treatment group were also less likely than those in the control group to attend a school that offered special programs for non-English speakers (26 vs. 57 percent), special programs for students with learning problems (71 vs. 88 percent), counselors (69 vs. 82 percent), tutors (50 vs. 67 percent), and after-school programs (86 vs. 92 percent).

#### *Student Participation*

As has been true in similar programs, not all students offered an OSP scholarship actually used it to enroll in a private school. For students assigned to the treatment group, during the first 3 years of the Program (figure 1):

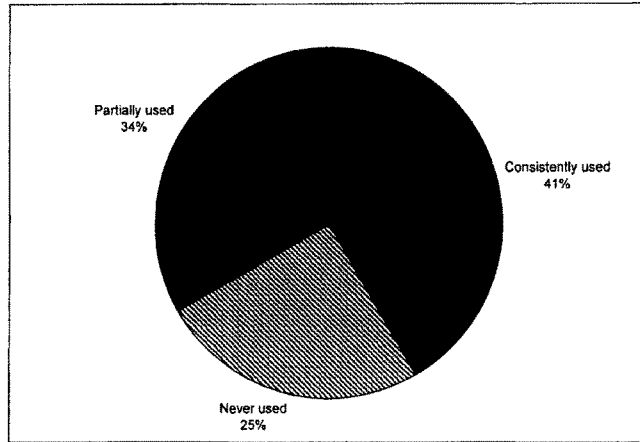
- 25 percent (346 out of 1,387 students) of those offered an OSP scholarship never used it;
- 34 percent (473 students) used their scholarship during some but not all of the first 3 years after the award; and
- The remaining 41 percent (568 students) used their scholarship consistently for the entire 3 years after the lottery.

The reasons for not using the scholarship—either initially or consistently—varied. The most common reasons cited by parents whose child never used their scholarship at anytime in year 3 and who completed surveys were (figure 2):

- Lack of available space in the private school they wanted their child to attend (22 percent of these parents);
- Child moved out of DC (21 percent of these parents);
- Child was accepted into a public charter school (19 percent of these parents); and

- Participating schools did not offer services for their child's learning or physical disability or other special needs (16 percent of these parents).

**Figure 1. Proportions of Treatment Group Students Who Experienced Various Categories of Usage in First 3 Years**



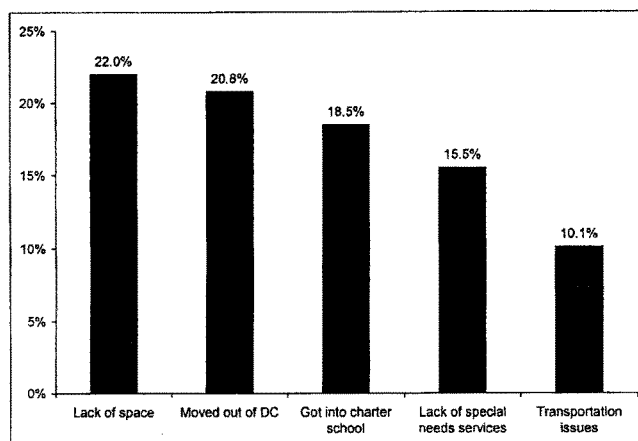
**NOTES:** Data are not weighted. Valid  $N = 1,387$ . Students were identified as scholarship users based upon information from WSF's payment files. Because some schools use a range of tuitions and some students had alternative sources of funding, students were classified as full users if WSF made payments on their behalf that equaled at least 80 percent of the school's annual tuition. Otherwise, students were identified as partial users (1 percent to 79 percent of tuition paid) or nonusers (no payments).

**SOURCES:** OSP applications and WSF's payment files.

The most common responses given by parents whose child initially used a scholarship in year 3 but dropped out of the OSP include:

- Lack of academic support that the child needed (39 percent of these parents);
- "Child did not like the private school" (25 percent);
- There was another private school the child liked better (13 percent);
- Work at the private school was too hard (11 percent);
- It was too difficult to get the child to the private school each day (11 percent); and
- The discipline or rules at the private school were too strict (7 percent).

**Figure 2. Most Common Reasons Given by Parents for Declining to Use the OSP Scholarship in Year 3**



NOTES: Responses are unweighted. Respondents were able to select multiple responses, which generated a total of 180 responses provided by 153 parents. This equates to an average of 1.2 responses per parent.

SOURCE: Impact Evaluation Parent Surveys.

Students who were partial users were more likely to have special needs and those entering the higher grades averaged lower baseline test scores than students who participated consistently across the 3 years.<sup>5</sup>

Students who never used the OSP scholarship offered to them, or who did not use the scholarship consistently, could have found their way into other (non-OSP-participating) private schools, public charter schools, or traditional DC public schools. The same alternatives were available to students who applied to the OSP but were never offered a scholarship (the impact sample's control group). Both the treatment and control groups moved between public (both traditional and charter) and private schools or between SINI and non-SINI schools. As a result, over the 3 years after they applied to the OSP:

- Among the treatment group, 3 percent remained in the same school they were in when they applied to the Program; 46 percent switched schools once; 40 percent switched schools twice; and 11 percent switched three times.

<sup>5</sup> At baseline, partial users in grades 9-12 were lower performing in reading (27 National Percentile Ranks (NPRs) vs. 40 NPRs for full users, statistically significant at the .05 level) and in math (29 NPRs vs. 49 NPRs for full users, statistically significant at the .01 level); partial users in grades 6-8 were lower performing in math (34 NPRs vs. 41 NPRs for full users, statistically significant at the .01 level); and partial users were more likely to have special needs (5 percent vs. 10 percent for full users, statistically significant at the .05 level).

- Among the control group, 15 percent remained in the same school they were in when they applied to the Program; 40 percent switched schools once; 37 percent switched schools twice; and 8 percent switched three times.

These patterns of student mobility are important because previous studies suggest that switching schools has an initial short-term negative effect on student achievement (Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin 2004).

### Impact of the Program After 3 Years: Key Outcomes

The statute that authorized the OSP mandated that the Program be evaluated with regard to its impact on student test scores and school safety, as well as the “success” of the Program, which, in the design of this study, includes satisfaction with school choices. The impacts of the Program on these outcomes are presented in two ways: (1) the impact of the *offer* of an OSP scholarship, derived straight from comparing outcomes of the treatment and control groups, and (2) the impact of *using* an OSP scholarship, calculated from the unbiased treatment-control group comparison, but statistically adjusting for students who declined to use their scholarships.<sup>6</sup> The main focus of this study was on the overall group of students, with a secondary interest in students who applied from SINI schools, followed by other subgroups of students (e.g., defined by their academic performance at application, their gender, or their grade level).

Previous reports released in spring 2007 and spring 2008 indicated that 1 and 2 years after application, there were no statistically significant impacts on overall academic achievement or on student perceptions of school safety or satisfaction (Wolf et al. 2007; Wolf et al. 2008). Parents were more satisfied if their child was in the Program and viewed their child’s school as safer and more orderly. Among the secondary analyses of subgroups, there were impacts on math test scores in year 1 for students who applied from non-SINI schools and those with relatively higher pre-Program test scores, and impacts in reading test scores (but not math) in year 2 for those same two subgroups plus students who applied in the first year of Program implementation. However, these findings were no longer statistically significant when subjected to a reliability test to adjust for the multiple comparisons of treatment and control group students across 10 subgroups; the results may be “false discoveries” and should therefore be interpreted and used with caution. Throughout this report, the phrases “appears to have an impact” and “may have

<sup>6</sup> This analysis uses straightforward statistical adjustments to account not only for the approximately 14 percent of impact sample year 3 respondents who received the offer of a scholarship but declined to use it over the 3-year period after application (the “never users”), but also the estimated 1.6 percent of the control group who never received a scholarship offer but who, by virtue of having a sibling with an OSP scholarship, ended up in a participating private school (we call this “program-enabled crossover”). These adjustments increase the size of the scholarship offer effect estimates, but do not alter the statistical significance of the impact estimate.

had an impact” are used to caution readers regarding statistically significant impacts that may have been false discoveries.

The analyses in this report were conducted using data collected on students 3 years after they applied to the OSP.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Impacts on Students and Parents Overall*

- Across the full sample, there was a statistically significant impact on reading achievement of 4.5 scale score points (effect size (ES) = .13)<sup>8</sup> from the offer of a scholarship and 5.3 scale score points (ES = .15) from the use of a scholarship (table 3). These impacts are equivalent to 3.1 and 3.7 months of additional learning, respectively.<sup>9</sup>
- There was no statistically significant impact on math achievement, overall (ES = .03) from the offer of a scholarship nor from the use of a scholarship (table 3).<sup>10</sup>
- Parents of students offered a scholarship were more likely to report their child’s school to be safer and have a more orderly school climate (ES = .29) compared to parents of students not offered a scholarship (figure 3); the same was true for parents of students who chose to use their scholarships (ES = .34).
- On the other hand, students who were offered a scholarship reported similar levels of school safety and an orderly climate compared to those in the control group (ES = .06; figure 3); there was also no significant impact on student reports of school safety and an orderly climate from using a scholarship (ES = .07).
- The Program produced a positive impact on parent satisfaction with their child’s school as measured by the likelihood of grading the school an “A” or “B,” both for the impact of a scholarship offer (ES = .22; figure 4) and the impact of scholarship use (ES = .26).

<sup>7</sup> Specifically, year 3 test scores were obtained from 69 percent of study participants, whereas parent survey data were gathered from 68 percent of participants and student survey data from 67 percent of participants. Response rates to the principal survey varied between 51.8 percent and 57.3 percent, depending on academic year and school sector. Missing outcome data create the potential for nonresponse bias in a longitudinal evaluation such as this one, if the nonrespondent portions of the sample are different between the treatment and control groups. Response rates differed by less than 2 percent between the treatment and control groups for the tests and parent and student surveys, meaning that similar proportions of the treatment and control groups provided outcome data. In addition, nonresponse weights were used to equate the two groups on important baseline characteristics, thereby reducing the threat of nonresponse bias in this case.

<sup>8</sup> An effect size (ES) is a standardized measure of the relative size of a program impact. In this report, effect sizes are expressed as a proportion of a standard deviation of the distribution of values observed for the study control group. One full standard deviation above and below the average value for a variable such as outcome test scores contains 64 percent of the observations in the distribution. Two full standard deviations above and below the average contain 95 percent of the observations.

<sup>9</sup> Scale score impacts were converted to approximate months of learning first by dividing the impact ES by the ES of the weighted (by grade) average annual increase in reading scale scores for the control group. The result was the proportion of a typical year of achievement gain represented by the programmatic impact. That number was further divided by nine to convert the magnitude of the gain to months, since the official school year in the District of Columbia comprises 9 months of instruction.

<sup>10</sup> The magnitudes of these estimated achievement effects are below the threshold of .12 standard deviations, estimated by the power analysis to be the study’s Minimum Detectable Effect (MDE) size.

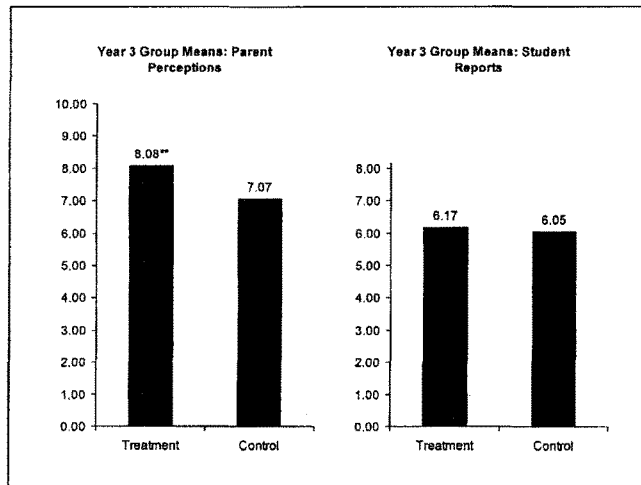
**Table 3. Year 3 Impact Estimates of the Offer and Use of a Scholarship on the Full Sample: Academic Achievement**

Student Achievement	Impact of the Scholarship Offer (ITT)				Impact of Scholarship Use (IOT)		p-value of estimates
	Treatment Group Mean	Control Group Mean	Difference (Estimated Impact)	Effect Size	Adjusted Impact Estimate	Effect Size	
Reading	635.44	630.98	4.46*	.13	5.27*	.15	.01
Math	630.15	629.35	.81	.03	.95	.03	.62

\*Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

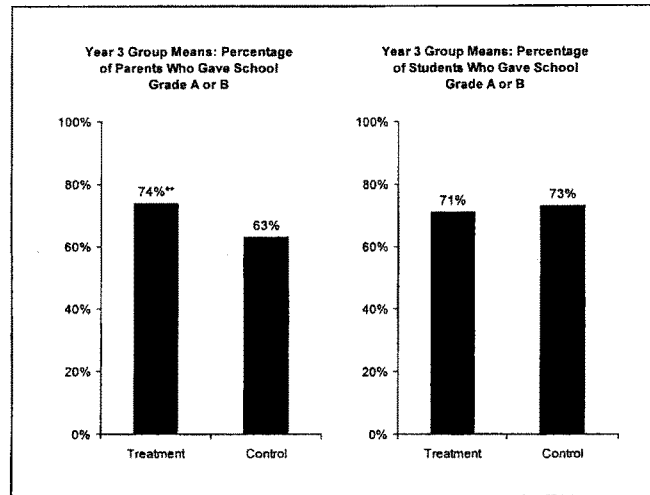
NOTES: Means are regression adjusted using a consistent set of baseline covariates. Impacts are displayed in terms of scale scores. Effect sizes are in terms of standard deviations. Valid *N* for reading = 1,460; math = 1,468. Separate reading and math sample weights used.

**Figure 3. Parent Perceptions and Student Reports of Safety and an Orderly School Climate**



\*\*Statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level.

NOTES: Parent perceptions are based on a ten-point scale; student reports are based on an eight-point scale. For parent perceptions, valid *N* = 1,423; parent survey weights were used; the ten-point index of indicators of school safety and an orderly environment includes the absence of property destruction, tardiness, truancy, fighting, cheating, racial conflict, weapons, drug distribution, drug/alcohol use, and teacher absenteeism. For student reports, valid *N* = 1,098; student survey weights were used; the survey was given to students in grades 4-12; the means represent the absence of incidents on an eight-item index for student reports of students being a victim of theft, drug-dealing, assaults, threats, bullying or taunting, or had observed weapons at school. Means are regression adjusted using a consistent set of baseline covariates.

**Figure 4. Parent and Student Reports of School Satisfaction**

\*\*Statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level.

NOTES: For parent reports, valid  $N = 1,410$ ; parent survey weights were used. For student reports, valid  $N = 1,014$ ; student survey weights were used; the survey was given to students in grades 4-12. Means are regression adjusted using a consistent set of baseline covariates.

- Overall, there were no impacts of the OSP from being offered ( $ES = -.06$ ; figure 4) or using a scholarship ( $ES = -.07$ ) on students' satisfaction with their schools as measured by the likelihood of assigning their school a grade of "A" or "B."

#### *Impacts on Subgroups*

In addition to determining the general impacts of the OSP on all study participants, this evaluation also reports programmatic impacts on policy-relevant subgroups of students. The subgroups were designated prior to data collection and include students who were attending SINI versus non-SINI schools at application, those relatively higher or lower performing at baseline, girls or boys, elementary versus high school students, and those from application cohort 1 or cohort 2. Since the subgroup analysis involves significance tests across multiple comparisons of treatment and control students, some of which may be statistically significant merely by chance, these subgroup-specific results should be interpreted with caution. Specifically:

### Subgroup Achievement Impacts

- There were no statistically significant reading (ES = .05) or math (ES = .01) achievement impacts for the high-priority subgroup of students who had attended a SINI public school under *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* before applying to the Program.
- There were statistically significant impacts on reading test scores in year 3 for five subgroups of students, although the statistical significance of two of the subgroup findings was not robust to adjustments for multiple comparisons:
  - Students who attended non-SINI public schools prior to application to the Program (56 percent of the impact sample) scored an average of 6.6 scale score points higher in reading (ES = .19) if they were offered the scholarship compared to not being offered a scholarship and 7.7 scale score points higher (ES = .22) if they used their scholarship compared to not being offered a scholarship. These scale score differences between the treatment and control groups translate into 4.1 and 4.9 additional months of learning, or half a year of schooling based on a typical 9-month school year.
  - Students who entered the Program in the higher two-thirds of the test-score performance distribution at baseline (66 percent of the impact sample) scored an average of 5.5 scale score points higher in reading (ES = .17) if they were offered a scholarship and 6.2 scale score points higher (ES = .19) if they used their scholarship, impacts equivalent to 4.0 and 4.6 months of learning gains.
  - Female students scored an average of 5.1 scale score points higher in reading (ES = .15) if they were offered a scholarship and 5.8 scale score points higher (ES = .17) if they used their scholarship. These impacts represent 3.1 and 3.6 months of additional learning, respectively. The statistical significance of this finding was not robust to adjustments for multiple comparisons.
  - Students who entered the Program in grades K-8 (81 percent of the impact sample) scored an average of 5.2 scale score points higher in reading (ES = .15) or 2.9 months of additional learning if they were offered a scholarship compared to not being offered a scholarship and 6.0 scale score points higher (ES = .17) or 3.3 months of additional learning if they used their scholarship compared to not being offered a scholarship.
  - Students from the first cohort of applicants (21 percent of the impact sample) scored an average of 8.7 scale score points higher in reading (ES = .31) if they were offered a scholarship compared to not being offered a scholarship and 11.7 scale score points higher (ES = .42) if they used their scholarship compared to not being offered a scholarship. These impacts translate into 14.1 and 18.9 months of additional learning (1.5 to 2 years of typical schooling). The statistical significance of this finding was not robust to adjustments for multiple comparisons.



- The OSP had no statistically significant reading impacts for other subgroups of participating students, including those in the lower third of the test-score performance distribution at baseline, boys, secondary students, and students from the second cohort of applicants (ES ranging from -.00 to .11).
- The OSP had no statistically significant math impacts for any of the 10 subgroups (ES ranging from -.16 to .23).

#### Subgroup Safety and Satisfaction Impacts

- All of the 10 subgroups analyzed, including parents of the high-priority subgroup of students who had attended SINI schools at baseline, reported viewing their child's school as safer and more orderly if the child was offered or using an OSP scholarship compared to not being offered a scholarship. Effect sizes for the impact of an offer of a scholarship on parent perceptions of safety and an orderly school climate for the 10 subgroups ranged from .27 to .40. Adjustments for multiple comparisons indicate that these 10 subgroup impacts on parental perceptions of safety and school climate are not likely to be false discoveries.
- Consistent with the finding for students overall, none of the subgroups of students reported experiencing differences in safety and an orderly school climate if they were offered (ES range from -.03 to .08) or using an OSP scholarship.
- In addition to an overall impact on parental satisfaction with their child's school, the Program produced satisfaction impacts on 7 of the 10 subgroups analyzed. Effect sizes for the impact of an offer of a scholarship on the likelihood of a parent grading his/her child's school "A" or "B" for these seven subgroups ranged from .16 to .41. Adjustments for multiple comparisons indicated that none of these parent satisfaction subgroup impacts may have been a false discovery. The parents of students who had attended SINI schools, parents of students in the lower one-third of the test score distribution, and parents of high school students generally did not report higher levels of school satisfaction that were statistically significant as a result of the treatment (ES ranged from -.03 to .13).
- There were no statistically significant differences between the treatment group and the control group for all 10 subgroups in the likelihood that students gave their school a grade of A or B (ES ranged from -.18 to .05).

### **The Impact of the Program on Intermediate Outcomes**

Understanding the mechanisms through which the OSP does or does not affect student outcomes requires examining the expectations, experiences, and educational environments made possible by Program participation. The analysis here estimates the impact of the Program on a set of "intermediate outcomes" that may be influenced by parents' choice of whether to use an OSP scholarship and where to use it, but are not end outcomes themselves. The method used to estimate the impacts on intermediate

outcomes is identical to that used to estimate impacts on the key Program outcomes, such as academic achievement.

Prior to data analysis, possible intermediate outcomes of the OSP were selected based on existing research and theory regarding scholarship programs and educational achievement. Because 24 intermediate outcome candidates were identified through this process, the variables were organized into four conceptual groups or clusters, as described below, to aid in the analysis.

There is no way to rigorously evaluate the linkages between the intermediate outcomes and achievement—students are not randomly assigned to the experience of various educational conditions and programs. That is why any findings from this element of the study do not suggest that we have learned what specific factors “caused” any observed test score impacts, only that certain factors emerge from the analysis as possible candidates for mediating influence because the Program affected students’ experience of these factors. The analyses are exploratory, and, given the number of factors analyzed, some of the statistically significant findings may be “false discoveries” (due to chance).

Overall, 3 years after applying to the Program, the offer of an Opportunity Scholarship appears to have had an impact on 8 of the 24 intermediate outcomes examined, 7 of which remained statistically significant after adjustments for multiple comparisons:

- **Home Educational Supports.** Of the four intermediate outcomes in this category, the offer of a scholarship had an impact on one of them. There was a significant negative impact on tutor usage outside of school ( $ES = -.14$ ), and this impact remained statistically significant after adjustments for multiple comparisons. There were no statistically significant differences between the treatment and control groups on parents’ reports of their involvement in school in year 3 ( $ES = -.11$ ), parents’ aspirations for how far in school their children would go ( $ES = .02$ ), or time required for the student to get to school (odds ratio = 1.13).<sup>11</sup>
- **Student Motivation and Engagement.** Of the six intermediate outcomes in this category, the offer of a scholarship may have had an impact on one of them. Based on student surveys, the offer of a scholarship seems to have had a significant negative impact on whether students read for fun ( $ES = -.16$ ). Adjustments for multiple comparisons, however, indicate that this result could be a false discovery, so it should be interpreted with caution. There were no statistically significant differences between the treatment and control groups in their reported aspirations for future schooling ( $ES = -.14$ ), engagement in extracurricular activities ( $ES = .04$ ), and frequency of doing homework ( $ES = .08$ ), or in their parents’ reports of student attendance (odds ratio = 1.11) or tardiness rates (odds ratio = 1.19).

<sup>11</sup> The effect size for this categorical variable is expressed as an odds ratio, which describes the extent to which being in the treatment group increases (if above 1.0) or decreases (if below 1.0) the likelihood of giving a higher-category response.

- **Instructional Characteristics.** The offer of a scholarship had a statistically significant impact on 5 of the 10 intermediate outcomes in this group of indicators. Students offered a scholarship experienced a lower likelihood that their school offered tutoring (ES = -.38), special programs for children who were English language learners (ES = -.61), or special programs for students with learning problems (ES = -.36) compared to control group students; these impacts remained statistically significant after adjustments for multiple comparisons. Students offered a scholarship experienced a higher likelihood that their school offered programs for advanced learners (ES = .27) and such enrichment programs as art, music, and foreign language (ES = .23); these two impact estimates also remained statistically significant after adjustments for multiple comparisons. There were no significant differences between the treatment and control groups in student/teacher ratio (ES = .01), how students rated their teacher's attitude (ES = -.04), the school's use of ability grouping (ES = .02), in-school tutor usage (ES = .04), or the availability of before- and after-school programs (ES = -.11).
- **School Environment.** The offer of a scholarship affected one of four measures of school environment. Students offered a scholarship experienced schools that were smaller by an average of 182 students (ES = -.29) than the schools attended by students in the control group; this impact remained statistically significant after adjustments for multiple comparisons. There were no statistically significant differences between the treatment and control groups, on average, in school reports of parent/school communication practices (ES = -.06), the percentage of minority students at the school (ES = -.10), or the classroom behavior of peers (ES = .09) based on student reports.

It is important to note that the findings regarding the impacts of the OSP reflect the particular Program elements that evolved from the law passed by Congress and the characteristics of students, families, and schools—public and private—that exist in the Nation's capital. The same program implemented in another city could yield different results, and a scholarship program in Washington, DC, with different design features than the OSP might also produce different outcomes.

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**Appendix 2****University of Notre Dame  
Alliance for Catholic Education****Mission**

The University of Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education sustains and strengthens under-resourced Catholic schools through leadership formation, research, and professional service to ensure that all children, especially those from low-income families, have the opportunity to experience the gift of an excellent Catholic education.

**History**

In 1993, Rev. Timothy Scully, CSC, and Rev. Sean McGraw, CSC, founded the Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE), Notre Dame's signature program designed to strengthen and sustain inner-city American Catholic schools. To prepare these highly-motivated new teachers, ACE developed an intensive two-year service and leadership experience that encourages new ACE teachers to grow as well-formed educators, committed community members, and role models throughout their term of service. In its first year, what is now known as ACE Service through Teaching placed 40 college graduates in schools in eight cities in the southeastern United States.

ACE Service through Teaching proved to be a first step toward more comprehensive engagement with urban K-12 schools for Notre Dame. In order to expand ACE's capacity to develop teachers, in 1998 Notre Dame established the University Consortium on Catholic Education to encourage and support other colleges and universities in efforts to replicate ACE. Thirteen universities now operate teacher preparation programs modeled on ACE.

In 2002, the University established the ACE Leadership Program to better prepare ACE graduates and others to become the next generation of Catholic school leaders. In 2007, the University created the English as a New Language program to support teachers who serve English language learners.

Currently, ACE Service through Teaching supports approximately 180 teachers in more than 100 elementary and secondary Catholic schools in over 30 communities each year, and the ACE Leadership program supports more than 50 school leaders nationwide. Together, these two programs prepare more teachers and principals for Catholic schools than any other institution.

Since its inception, ACE has commissioned over 1,000 teachers to serve throughout the United States, and more than 70% of these ACE graduates have remained in education beyond their two-year commitment to the program. The ACE Fellowship, established formally in 2004,

harnesses the energy and advocacy of these talented ACE graduates and other advocates of Catholic education to galvanize their support for urban Catholic schools.

In 2006, the Notre Dame Task Force on Catholic Education published *Making God Known, Loved, and Served: The Future of Catholic Primary and Secondary Schools in the United States*. The Task Force report made recommendations to the University, to other Catholic universities, and to the Church at large to support Catholic schools.

Since 2006, the University has responded to the Task Force recommendations by developing ACE Consulting, Notre Dame Magnificat Schools, the Notre Dame ACE Academies, the ACE Parental Choice Symposium, the Task Force on the Participation of Latinos in Catholic Schools, the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Initiative, ACE Press, and the Strategic Intervention Teams project. Each of these new efforts reflects ACE's commitment to uphold, to fortify, and to promote urban faith-based education. Strengthening its current efforts and boldly setting new goals, ACE strives to preserve inner-city Catholic schools as life-giving communities and signs of hope for future generations.

## Appendix 3

## Summary of research supporting the DC OSP and urban Catholic schools

## The researched case for the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program

- **Children are learning.** OSP students demonstrated the equivalent of 3.1 months of additional learning in reading in year 3 of the study (Wolf, Gutmann, Puma, Kisida, Rizzo, Eissa, & Silverberg, 2009). 88% of the OSP students in the study demonstrated statistically significant achievement gains in reading in year 2 (Wolf, Gutmann, Puma, Kisida, Rizzo, Eissa, & Silverberg, 2008, p. 37).
- **Parents are satisfied.** OSP parents are more highly satisfied with their children's schools than parents whose children remained in DCPS schools (Wolf et al. 2008, 2009).
- **Parents feel safer.** Parents believe their children's new schools are significantly less dangerous. (Wolf et al., 2008, 2009).
- **OSP students enjoy improved school conditions.** OSP students attend schools that are smaller, have smaller class sizes, and are better racially integrated than the schools (Wolf et al., 2008, 2009).
- **Parents are empowered.** Parents report taking an active role in their children's educational lives and they see the OSP as providing a means for their family to break the cycle of poverty (Stewart, Wolf, Cornman, McKenzie-Thompson, & Butcher, 2009).
- **The OSP makes fiscal sense.** The District of Columbia spends nearly \$13,500 per student in DC Public Schools (US Census Bureau, 2008). The OSP is federally-funded and costs, on average, only \$5,000 per child.
- **Low-income Latinos are particularly satisfied with the program.** They believe their children are more motivated, more focused, and working harder than they did in their previous schools (Stewart et al., 2009, p. 32).
- **Parental choice improves public schools.** Seventeen empirical studies have examined how vouchers affect academic achievement in public schools. Of these studies, 16 find that parental choice programs improved public schools and only one, the study of the DC OSP, finds no effect on public schools. No empirical studies have found that parental choice programs harm public schools (Forster, 2009; Hoxby, 1994).

### The researched case for Catholic schools

- The achievement gap is smaller in faith-based schools (Jeynes, 2007; Marks & Lee, 1989).
- Students in Catholic and other private schools demonstrate higher academic achievement than students from similar backgrounds in public schools (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Greeley, 1982; Sander, 1996).
- Latino and African American students who attend Catholic schools are more likely to graduate from high school and more likely to graduate from college than their public school peers (Benson, Yeager, Guerra, & Manno, 1986; Evans & Schwab, 1995; Neal, 1997; Sander & Krautman, 1995).
- The “multiply disadvantaged” benefit most from Catholic schools (Evans & Schwab, 1995; Greeley, 1982; Neal, 1997).
- Social class effects on educational achievement are significantly lessened in Catholic schools (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Greeley, 1982).
- The poorer and more at-risk a student is, the greater the relative achievement gains in Catholic schools (York, 1996).
- Graduates of Catholic high schools are more likely to vote than public school graduates (Dee, 2005).
- Graduates of Catholic schools are likely to earn higher wages than public school graduates (Hoxby, 1994; Neal, 1997).
- Catholic schools tend to produce graduates who are more civically engaged, more tolerant for diverse views, and more committed to service as adults (Campbell, 2001; Greeley & Rossi, 1966; Greene, 1998; Wolf, Greene, Kleitz, & Thalhammer, 2001).



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## Appendix 4

## Op-Ed articles expressing support for the reauthorization of the DC OSP

1. An "Appropriate" Education - Washington Post, April 28
2. Obama Wrong on DC School Vouchers and Hypocritical, Just Like Congress – US News and World Report – April 22
3. Obama's Outrageous Sin Against Our Kids - Fox News, April 20
4. Education, by any means - Washington Post, April 14
5. Do what's best for kids - Chicago Tribune, April 10
6. It works for kids, but it's a goner - Indianapolis Star, April 10
7. Vouchers: Not Dead Yet - National Review, April 8
8. Duncan's Fundamental Dishonesty - Denver Post, April 8
9. School Choice - American Chronicle, April 6
10. DC voucher students begin to nudge ahead - Education Week, April 6
11. And what happens to results showing school choice works? - Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, April 6
12. Democrats and poor kids - The Wall Street Journal, April 5
13. Don't pull the plug yet - The Washington Post, April 4
14. Obama's shameful silence - The Washington Times, March 30
15. The city's children need opportunities - The Washington Post, March 29
16. Why We Must Fight for School Choice - National Review Online, March 27
17. Politicians kill DC voucher program-Foxnews.com, March 17
18. Vouchers on the line-Washington Post, March 14
19. No picnic for me either-New York Times, March 12
20. Congress vs. DC kids-Washington Times, March 12
21. Obama, Dems wrong to kill school vouchers-CNN, March 11
22. Obama and the schools-Wall Street Journal, March 9
23. A cruel school move-Chicago Tribune, March 9
24. Putting unions first-New York Post, March 9
25. Fenty MIA on vouchers-Washington Post, March 7
26. Congress callous to kids-Orange County Register, March 5
27. Will Barack Obama stand up for these kids?-Wall Street Journal, March 3
28. A vote for ignorance-Chicago Tribune, March 3
29. "Potential" Disruption?-Washington Post, March 2
30. Why doesn't Ty'Sheoma have a choice?-Washington Post, March 1
31. Congress' sneaky slap at DC's kids- New York Post, Feb. 26
32. Voucher subterfuge-Washington Post, February 25

## The Washington Post

### An 'Appropriate' Education

A Supreme Court case highlights a question: Why deny D.C. children what special-needs students get?

Tuesday, April 28 2009

THE SUPREME COURT will hear arguments today about the use of public money for the private schooling of children with special needs. It's interesting to note what's not at issue: namely, that when a public school system is unable to provide an appropriate education, it is obligated to pay the costs of private school. Too bad poor children don't have that unassailable right; if they did, there would be no controversy about the District program that gives vouchers to low-income children to attend private schools.

The case to be heard by the court, *Forest Grove v. T.A.*, hinges on whether parents have to enroll a child with special needs in public school before the child can attend private school at public expense. Special-education advocates say students shouldn't have to waste time before being placed in a setting that best suits their needs, while school boards worry about a ruling that could amount to an unfettered right to private schooling at public expense. What strikes us about the emotionally charged debate is the acceptance by both sides that sometimes it is appropriate to use public money to pay for a child go to a private school. So, why all the hullabaloo about the approximately \$14 million for a federally funded voucher program that lets 1,700 D.C. students attend private schools instead of failing public schools?

To hear critics of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program tell it, the use of public money for private schooling is as unprecedented as it is undesirable. But, as education think tank founder Andrew J. Rotherham recently wrote on his *Eduwonk* blog, "Public funds and private schools are plenty entangled now and the idea of bright lines is a rhetorical fiction." In addition to the billions of dollars spent annually on private school tuitions for students with disabilities, he noted, private schools get public money for books, technology, teacher training and Title I services. As long as the money is seen as benefiting the child, it is deemed a proper, even desirable, use of public dollars.

Don't get us wrong. We're not arguing for the unilateral right of parents to enroll their sons and daughters in any school they wish with the taxpayer picking up the tab. Abuse of special-education provisions has contributed to escalating costs that threaten to take needed money from general public education funds. Safeguards are needed. Public schools should be pressed to do a better job for students with disabilities and students without. But there are schools in Washington where statistics show that failure is almost guaranteed. If a school system can't educate a child -- whether because of acute special needs or its own historical failings -- why should that child not have options for a "free appropriate public education"?

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## Obama Wrong on D.C. School Vouchers and Hypocritical, Just Like Congress

April 22, 2009 05:48 PM ET | Peter Roff | [Permanent Link](#) |

By Peter Roff, Thomas Jefferson Street blog

Despite giving lip service to education reform, the Obama administration has decided to put an end to the very successful D.C. school voucher program. This despite a United States Department of Education report that found students in the nation's capital that were provided with vouchers allowing them to attend private school through the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program had made statistically significant gains in reading achievement.

According to the department's evaluation of the three-year-old program, "those offered a scholarship were performing at statistically higher levels in reading—equivalent to 3.1 months of additional learning," something very much in line with previous findings concerning the program's effectiveness.

Columnist Juan Williams, who can often be found providing the liberal perspective on the Fox News Channel, called the decision to end the program, "Obama's outrageous sin against our kids."

"The cause of my upset is watching the key civil rights issue of this generation—improving big city public school education—get tossed overboard by political gamesmanship," Williams wrote Monday. "If there is one goal that deserves to be held above day-to-day partisanship and pettiness of ordinary politics it is the effort to end the scandalous poor level of academic achievement and abysmally high drop-out rates for America's black and Hispanic students."

The D.C. voucher program provided D.C. parents desperate to find a quality education for their children a much needed lifeline. Unfortunately, as Williams pointed out, the program has fallen victim to the education politics.

"With no living, breathing students profiting from the program to give it a face and stand and defend it the Congress has little political pressure to put new money into the program," Williams wrote Monday. "The political pressure will be coming exclusively from the teacher's unions who oppose the vouchers, just as they oppose No Child Left Behind and charter schools and every other effort at reforming public schools that continue to fail the nation's most vulnerable young people, low income blacks and Hispanics.

"The National Education Association and other teachers' unions have put millions into Democrats' congressional campaigns because they oppose Republican efforts to challenge unions on their resistance to school reform and specifically their refusal to support ideas such as performance-based pay for teachers who raise students' test scores," he continued.

Education politics are big business in America, often pitting institutionalized interests like the NEA against parents and kids. And, equally unfortunately, there are far too many people who are in a position to right the wrongs who are taking advantage of their ability to opt out of the discussion, at least as far as their own children are concerned.

A new report from The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank that supports education reform, found that 44 percent of current United States senators and 36 percent of current members of the U.S. House of Representatives "had at one time sent their children to private schools."

"Among the general public," the report says, "only 11 percent of American students attend private schools." What's more, the Heritage report found that one fifth of members of the 111th Congress attended private high schools themselves, which is nearly twice the rate of the public at large.

Former North Carolina Sen. and Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards liked to go around talking about the "two Americas." Where education is concerned, he may have been on to something. There's one America for the elites, like members of Congress and the President and Mrs. Obama, who send their children to private schools; and there's one for everyone else, the regular people who, at least in the District of Columbia, are seeing the educational dreams they have for their children shattered on the altar of politics.

## THE FOX FORUM

April 20th, 2009 4:55 PM Eastern

### **JUAN WILLIAMS: Obama's Outrageous Sin Against Our Kids**

As I watch Washington politics I am not easily given to rage.

Washington politics is a game and selfishness, out-sized egos and corruption are predictable.

But over the last week I find myself in a fury.

The cause of my upset is watching the key civil rights issue of this generation — improving big city public school education — get tossed overboard by political gamesmanship. If there is one goal that deserves to be held above day-to-day partisanship and pettiness of ordinary politics it is the effort to end the scandalous poor level of academic achievement and abysmally high drop-out rates for America's black and Hispanic students.

**The reckless dismantling of the D.C. voucher program does not speak well of the promise by Obama to be the "Education President."**

This is critical to our nation's future in terms of workforce preparation to compete in a global economy but also to fulfill the idea of racial equality by providing a real equal opportunity for all young people who are willing to work hard to succeed.

In a politically calculated dance step the Obama team first indicated that they wanted the Opportunity Scholarship Program to continue for students lucky enough to have won one of the vouchers. The five-year school voucher program is scheduled to expire after the school year ending in June 2010. Secretary Duncan said in early March that it didn't make sense "to take kids out of a school where they're happy and safe and satisfied and learning... those kids need to stay in their school."

And all along the administration indicated that pending evidence that this voucher program or any other produces better test scores for students they were willing to fight for it. The president has said that when it comes to better schools he is open to supporting "what works for kids." That looked like a level playing field on which to evaluate the program and even possibly expanding the program.

But last week Secretary Duncan announced that he will not allow any new students to enter the D.C. voucher program. In fact, he had to take back the government's offer of scholarships to 200 students who had won a lottery to get into the program starting next year. His rationale is that if the program does not win new funding from Congress then those students might have to go back to public school in a year.

He does not want to give the students a chance for a year in a better school? That does not make sense if the students and their families want that life-line of hope. It does not make sense if there is a real chance that the program might win new funding as parents, educators and politicians rally to undo the "bigotry of low expectations" and open doors of opportunity — wherever they exist — for more low-income students.

And now Secretary Duncan has applied a sly, political check-mate for the D.C. voucher plan.

With no living, breathing students profiting from the program to give it a face and stand and defend it the Congress has little political pressure to put new money into the program. The political pressure will be coming exclusively from the teacher's unions who oppose the vouchers, just as they oppose No Child Left Behind and charter schools and every other effort at reforming public schools that continue to fail the nation's most vulnerable young people, low income blacks and Hispanics.

The National Education Association and other teachers' unions have put millions into Democrats' congressional campaigns because they oppose Republican efforts to challenge unions on their resistance to school reform and specifically their refusal to support ideas such as performance-based pay for teachers who raise students' test scores.

By going along with Secretary Duncan's plan to hollow out the D.C. voucher program this president, who has spoken so passionately about the importance of education, is playing rank politics with the education of poor children. It is an outrage.

This voucher programs is unique in that it takes no money away from the beleaguered District of Columbia Public Schools. Nationwide, the strongest argument from opponents of vouchers is that it drains hard-to-find dollars from public schools that educate the majority of children.

But Congress approved the D.C. plan as an experiment and funded it separately from the D.C. school budget. It is the most generous voucher program in the nation, offering \$7,500 per child to help with tuition to a parochial or private school.

With that line of attack off the table, critics of vouchers pointed out that even \$7,500 is not enough to pay for the full tuition to private schools where the price of a year's education can easily go beyond \$20,000. But nearly 8,000 students applied for the vouchers. And a quarter of them, 1,714 children, won the lottery and took the money as a ticket out of the D.C. public schools.



The students, almost all of them black and Hispanic, patched together the voucher money with scholarships, other grants and parents willing to make sacrifices to pay their tuition.

What happened, according to a Department of Education study, is that after three years the voucher students scored 3.7 months higher on reading than students who remained in the D.C. schools. In addition, students who came into the D.C. voucher program when it first started had a 19 month advantage in reading after three years in private schools.

It is really upsetting to see that the Heritage Foundation has discovered that 38 percent of the members of Congress made the choice to put their children in private schools. Of course, Secretary Duncan has said he decided not to live in Washington, D.C. because he did not want his children to go to public schools there. And President Obama, who has no choice but to live in the White House, does not send his two daughters to D.C. public schools, either. They attend a private school, Sidwell Friends, along with two students who got there because of the voucher program.

This reckless dismantling of the D.C. voucher program does not bode well for arguments to come about standards in the effort to reauthorize No Child Left Behind. It does not speak well of the promise of President Obama to be the "Education President," who once seemed primed to stand up for all children who want to learn and especially minority children.

And its time for all of us to get outraged about this sin against our children.

# The Washington Post

## Education, By Any Means

By Anthony A. Williams and Kevin P. Chavous  
Tuesday, April 14, 2009

*"We want freedom by any means necessary."*

When Malcolm X uttered those words in June 1964, a chill traveled down the spine of America. The phrase signaled a change in the tone and tenor of the civil rights movement. It was understood that those fighting for equality and justice were willing to do anything to achieve those rights. Malcolm's words made clear that tedious, incremental steps toward freedom for African Americans were unacceptable and would not be tolerated. "By any means necessary" represented a crossroads in the civil rights movement.

Our nation faces a similar crossroads today regarding education reform. Ensuring that every American child receives equal access to high-quality education represents our last civil rights struggle. By any objective measure, the educational offerings we provide for our children, particularly children of color, do them a disservice.

Consider:

-- Barely half of the African American and Latino students who enter high school graduate.

-- The reading skills gap between white 17-year-olds and 17-year-olds of color is greater today than it was in 1990.

As a nation, our educational outputs for all children continue to slide in comparison with other industrialized nations. And in the District, as in many cities, we endure equally shocking deficits. D.C. Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee has testified that:

-- As of the 2006-07 school year, less than half of D.C. students were proficient in reading or math.

-- Some city schools reported a 70 percent achievement gap.

-- Only 9 percent of District students entering ninth grade graduated from college within nine years of beginning high school.

The reality of our children's deficits demands much more than we have given them. Platitudes, well-crafted speeches and the latest three-to-five-year reform plan aren't good enough. We must find ways to educate every child now, by any means necessary.

It was that spirit that led us, as elected officials of the District in 2003, to promote the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. The program, which provides scholarships for low-income children to attend private schools, is part of the three-sector initiative that annually provides \$50 million in federal funding to the District for education purposes. That money has been equally divided among D.C. Public Schools, D.C. Public Charter Schools and the scholarship program.

Preliminary data suggest that the program has been an overwhelming success. An Education Department study released this month shows that students in the program have higher overall math and reading scores than when they entered the program. The study also points to high satisfaction with their children's schools among parents with children in the program. In short, those in this program have clearly benefited from being in a new school environment.

Despite these obvious signs of success, though, some in Congress want to end the program. Its funding is set to expire after the next school year ends, but some have even suggested curtailing it immediately so that these students can be placed in D.C. public schools as soon as possible. Already, no more students are being enrolled. These naysayers -- many of whom are fellow Democrats -- see vouchers as a tool to destroy the public education system. Their rhetoric and ire are largely fueled by those special-interest groups that are more dedicated to the adults working in the education system than to making certain every child is properly educated.

To us, that narrow perspective is wrongheaded and impractical, especially during these perilous economic times. Rather than talking about ending this scholarship program, federal lawmakers should allow more children to benefit from it.

President Obama said last month that "the relative decline of American education is untenable for our economy, it's unsustainable for our democracy, it's unacceptable for our children -- and we can't afford to let it continue." We agree with the president. But unless we are willing to embrace all legitimate means to educate our children, we are abandoning them. How many more have to go without a proper education and give up their dreams before we say, "Enough"?

We should learn from the legacy of Malcolm X and the civil rights movement. In the long term, let us continue to reform, recalibrate and reenergize our education system. In the short term, however, we cannot afford to lose any more children to bad schooling. We must be willing to allow innovation and creativity to flourish so that all children benefit today. "By any means necessary" is a calling. The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program is a necessary means of educating children who otherwise would be lost; it must be maintained and allowed to flourish.

*Anthony A. Williams, a Democrat, was mayor of the District from 1999 to 2007. Kevin P. Chavous, a former Democratic member of the D.C. Council, is the author of "Serving Our Children: Charter Schools and the Reform of American Public Education" and a distinguished fellow with the Center for Education Reform.*

## Do what's best for kids

April 10, 2009

When last we looked in on the federal voucher program that helps 1,700 poor children, Democrats had pushed it to the brink of extinction. Their party line (muttered somewhat dismissively) was: We need to see whether this pilot program works. They clearly were hoping for some proof that it doesn't.

Well, a new batch of evidence arrived last week suggesting that it does. This is the third of three "gold-standard" research efforts that have found positive impacts of voucher programs.

That deafening silence you hear is Congress and the Obama administration, fearful of furies from teachers unions if public pressure now builds for continuation of the District of Columbia voucher program, which mostly helps low-income African-American and Latino children.

The research arm of the U.S. Department of Education found that D.C. students who used vouchers to attend private schools scored better on reading tests, by a statistically significant margin, than their peers in public schools. No wonder the department's Institute of Education Sciences also found parents of students in the voucher program more satisfied with their children's new schools than were parents of the public students.

It's important to note that the children who got vouchers weren't singled out for that privilege because someone perceived them to be more promising: They were simply chosen to receive vouchers in a lottery that was necessary because so many impoverished minority parents are desperate to give their children the same private-school options that more affluent families—including presidents and members of Congress—enjoy.

President Barack Obama, when he was candidate Obama, seemed willing to keep an open mind about the D.C. voucher program. "If there was any argument for vouchers, it was, 'Let's see if it works,'" he said in February 2008, "and if it does, whatever my preconception, you do what's best for kids."

Trouble is, Congress has passed legislation shaped by Sen. Dick Durbin and others that likely kills the D.C. voucher program. So the timing of the new findings, with their positive news about the program's effects on students and parents, is unfortunate. As Manhattan Institute education researcher Jay Greene told *The Wall Street Journal*, "There are transition difficulties, a culture shock upon entering a school where you're expected to pay attention, learn, do homework. But these results fit a pattern that we've seen in other evaluations of vouchers. Benefits compound over time."

That's the key sentence: *Benefits compound over time*. And this D.C. experiment is still young; the new evaluation covers only the voucher program's first three years. The two prior gold-standard studies, both of Milwaukee's voucher program, also found significant gains after three years—with still higher gains in years four and five.

Durbin told us this week that he views the latest findings as "at best mixed results." He notes that voucher students didn't perform better than public school students in math. They scored the same. But we hope Durbin comes to appreciate the rising trajectory of reading progress—and of parental satisfaction—in a program that costs far less per pupil (\$7,500 per year) than what D.C. or Chicago public schools spend.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan, he formerly of the Chicago Public Schools, quickly reacted to the new study by saying he's ready to see the program end. To which The Washington Post tartly retorted in an editorial:

"It makes sense to want to do further study before rendering a verdict on the efficacy of vouchers. So it's perplexing that Mr. Duncan, without any further discussion or analysis, would be so quick to kill a program that is supported by local officials and that has proven popular with parents. Unless, of course, politics enters the calculation in the form of Democratic allies in Congress who have been shameless in their efforts to kill vouchers."

Durbin told us he's "not ruling out supporting this" voucher program. He'll await further evidence at hearings to be chaired by Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.)

Sen. Durbin, Secretary Duncan, the evidence is piling up on your desks. The burden of proof is squarely on you to prove why, after so few years, we should stop—and stop evaluating—a program that is showing certifiable prospects of changing the futures of disadvantaged kids. You gentlemen know the embarrassing truth of what we've said previously: Opponents of school vouchers don't want to snuff the life out of this program because they think it's failing, but because they fear it's working.

This is an excellent opportunity for both of you to acknowledge that you've been too hasty—and that if vouchers do work, the Obama administration will want to expand them, not quash them. As the now-president put it, we need to do what's best for kids.

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# INDYSTAR.COM

April 10, 2009

It works for kids, but it's a goner

Despite being "a skeptic of vouchers," candidate Barack Obama promised this would not prevent him from "making sure that our kids can learn." As he told the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, "You do what works for the kids."

On Jan. 21, President Obama declared, "My administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government." Just 10 weeks later, Obama has broken both these promises. And poor-but-promising minority kids suffer the consequences.

These 1,714 children -- 90 percent black and 9 percent Hispanic -- enjoy the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. They each receive up to \$7,500 for private or parochial schools outside Washington's dismal government-education system.

But Obama stayed silent as Congress scheduled this initiative's demise after the next academic year. Both a Democratic Congress and D.C. authorities must reauthorize the program -- not likely.

Now it emerges that Obama's Department of Education possessed peer-reviewed, congressionally mandated, research proving the program's success. Though it demonstrates "what works for the kids," DOE hid this study until Congress squelched these children's dreams.

This analysis compared voucher users' test scores to those of students who requested vouchers but lost the award lottery. Among DOE's results:

While they were no better at math, voucher recipients read 3.7 months ahead of non-voucher students.

Student subgroups showed "1/3 to 2 years of additional learning growth."

Worse yet, DOE researchers reportedly were forbidden to publicize or discuss their findings. One expects better from Obama, who won a scholarship at age 10 to attend Hawaii's prestigious, private Punahou school.

With young black kids themselves begging for vouchers, why would reputedly pro-poor, pro-black Democrats kill this popular and effective school-choice program?

Follow the money: Teachers' unions' paid \$55,794,440 in political donations between 1990 and 2008, 96 percent to Democrats. An amendment to rescue DC's vouchers failed 39-58. Among 57 Democrats voting, 54 (or 95 percent) opposed DC vouchers.

When poor, black school kids start making political donations, Democratic politicians will start fighting for them.



## Vouchers: Not Dead Yet

President Obama has all the evidence he needs to save the D.C. voucher program

April 8, 2009, 4:00AM

By Jay P. Greene

The Washington, D.C., voucher program is not dead yet. Congress has set its execution date, slipping a provision into last month's omnibus spending bill to end the program unless it is re-authorized by Congress next year. With anti-voucher members of Congress in a clear majority, supporters of the program are glum about its political prospects.

The pall has extended to voucher programs around the country. If our legislators can terminate the D.C. program without too much political cost, might they decide to become serial killers, targeting vulnerable programs in Milwaukee, Ohio, and elsewhere?

Oddly, Congress chose to act even as the programs continue to produce solid evidence of academic effectiveness. Just this week, the U.S. Department of Education released the results of its official evaluation of the D.C. voucher program. It found that students selected by lottery to receive vouchers to attend private schools made significantly greater progress in reading than did lottery losers who stayed in D.C. district or charter schools. A student attending a private school with a voucher typically was four months ahead of the average public-school student in reading after three years. What's more, the earliest participants in the voucher program — presumably, kids from those families most eager to escape D.C. public-school failure — were ahead of their public-school counterparts by the equivalent of 19 months of reading instruction after three years in private schools.

Last week, I released a study [PDF] that is part of the legislatively mandated evaluation of Milwaukee's voucher program. It found that competition from the voucher program has improved the academic performance of students remaining in Milwaukee's public schools by about 12 percentage points over the history of the program. That is, vouchers did more than benefit the students who received them; they motivated the entire school system to improve.

But the mood is so negative on vouchers that even these positive results have been viewed negatively. For example, press reports interpreted the evidence from Milwaukee as disappointing because voucher participants did not make greater academic progress than their public-school counterparts in one year's time. But a large difference between the two groups should not be expected in a case where vouchers create a rising tide that is lifting all boats. The voucher students benefit by finding schools that match their needs

more closely, and the public-school students benefit from a school system that is more highly motivated to do what it takes to discourage any more students (and the tax dollars they bring with them) from leaving with vouchers.

Frankly, the results in Milwaukee should be seen as even more encouraging than the results in D.C. My colleague Marcus Winters and I looked for evidence that D.C. public schools were improving in response to expanded choice and competition, but we were unable to find any. Vouchers in D.C. currently benefit only voucher recipients because the D.C. public schools have essentially been protected financially against the loss of students to vouchers. The schools don't lose revenue when they lose students, and so their motivation to respond to expanded competition is undermined.

Despite all the encouraging evidence from voucher evaluations, some people are determined to maintain their voucher depression. Milwaukee schools are still abysmally underperforming, they'll say. That may be, but the evidence shows that things would have been much worse if there had not been a voucher program. They'll say the gains in D.C. are too small, were only tested in reading, and weren't even detectable in the first two years of the program. True, but voucher benefits generally take a few years to materialize, since students experience some initial setbacks whenever they switch schools. And all of these results are from constrained programs with vouchers worth only a fraction of the per-pupil spending in public schools.

Besides, no large-scale reform has managed to produce huge improvements for low-income minority students in a short time frame. I'm hard pressed to think of any other reform that has proved, after rigorous evaluation, to have produced any gains at all under those conditions. If you require dramatic improvements overnight from education reform, you are likely to be chronically depressed.

Education reformers need to get out of their funk. First, they need to keep goals for educational improvement realistic and continue pursuing evidence-backed reforms like vouchers, even if they are currently out of favor in national politics. And the positive evidence may well save D.C. vouchers and others facing execution. They may even get a reprieve from President Obama, who has declared: "If there was any argument for vouchers it was, all right, let's see if this experiment works, and then if it does, whatever my preconceptions, my attitude is you do what works for the kids." If doing what works for the kids decides the issue, vouchers have a very promising future.

— Jay P. Greene is endowed professor of education reform at the University of Arkansas and a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute.



# denverpost.com

## Harsanyi: Duncan's fundamental dishonesty

By David Harsanyi

Posted: 04/08/2009 12:30:00 AM MDT

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan argues that we have an obligation to disregard politics to do whatever is "good for the kids."

Well then, one wonders, why did his Department of Education bury a politically inconvenient study regarding education reform? And why, now that the evidence is public, does the administration continue to ignore it and allow reform to be killed?

When Congress effectively shut down the D.C. voucher program last month, snatching \$7,500 Opportunity Scholarship vouchers from disadvantaged kids, it failed to conduct substantive debate (as is rapidly becoming tradition).

Then the Wall Street Journal editorial board reported that the Department of Education had buried a study that illustrated unquestionable and pervasive improvement among kids who won vouchers, compared to the kids who didn't. Not only was the report disregarded, the Department of Education issued a gag order on any discussion about it.

Is this what Duncan meant by following the evidence?

When I had the chance to ask Duncan — at a meeting of the Denver Post editorial board on Tuesday — whether he was alerted to this study before Congress eradicated the D.C. program, he offered an unequivocal "no." He then called the WSJ editorial "fundamentally dishonest" and maintained that no one had even tried to contact him, despite the newspaper's contention that it did, repeatedly.

When I called the Wall Street Journal, I discovered a different — that is, meticulously sourced and exceedingly convincing — story, including documented e-mail conversations between the author and higher-ups in Duncan's office. The voucher study — which showed progress compounding yearly — had been around since November and its existence is mandated by law. So at best, Duncan was willfully ignorant.

But the most "fundamentally dishonest" aspect of the affair was Duncan's feeble argument against the program. First, he strongly intimated that since only 1 percent of children were able to "escape" (and, boy, *that's* some admission) from D.C. public schools through this program, it was not worth saving.

So, you may ask, why not allow the 1 percent to turn into 2 percent or 10 percent, instead of scrapping the program? After all, only moments earlier, Duncan claimed that there was no magic reform bullet and it would take a multitude of innovations to fix education.

Then, Duncan, after thrashing the scholarship program and study, emphasized that he was opposed to "pulling kids out of a program" in which they were "learning." Geez. If they're learning in this program, why kill it? And if the program was insignificant, as Duncan claimed, why keep these kids in it? Are these students worse off? Or are they just inconveniencing the rich kids?

Duncan can't be honest, of course. Not when it's about politics and paybacks to unions who are about as interested in reforming education as teenagers are in calculus.

Politicians say a lot of things, but to glean any insight we need only examine the decision they make in their own lives. President Obama sent his children to a private school in Chicago rather than entrust their education to then-CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, Arne Duncan. He's not alone.

And this is just another example of how the Democrats who killed this scholarship program, specifically designed for disadvantaged kids, are so deeply hypocritical and dishonest. Ask the two kids who attend Sidwell Friends School, where the Obama girls now go, on vouchers. Their escape from failing schools is about to be cut off by a complicit administration.

"A lot of folks will give you a million reasons to why things can't change," claims the secretary of Education.

It's true. And one of the leading disseminators of pitiable excuses is Arne Duncan.

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# AMERICAN CHRONICLE

## School Choice

By: Norman Roberts  
April 06, 2009

"Parents--the first and most important educators--have a fundamental right to choose the education best suited to the needs of their children, including public, private, and religious schools." USSCB Faithful Citizenship (72), November 2007

Catholics lost an important skirmish last month in Washington. So did the nation. When congress voted to end the city's school voucher program, they did so despite an official analysis showing significantly better academic progress in children who participated in the program compared to students who remained in D.C. public schools. Washington schools have long been known as among the nations poorest performing. They are also among the most expensive. According to The Heritage Foundation the district spends more per pupil than any state, and far more than the national average. The vouchers are each worth a little more than half what the district spends per student. Ninety percent of the students receiving the vouchers are black. Nine percent are Hispanic. All are from families that could not otherwise afford private schools.

It amounts to an ongoing national scandal. In the last half century there have been just four school age children in the White House. The Kennedy children were too young. Amy Carter famously attended public schools but had difficulty making friends and couldn't be allowed outside during recess because the playground was too near the street. Chelsea Clinton went to the prestigious and private Sidwell Friends School, as do the Obama children. President Clinton opposed vouchers. Two children now at Sidwell will apparently be forced to leave under legislation President Obama has signed.

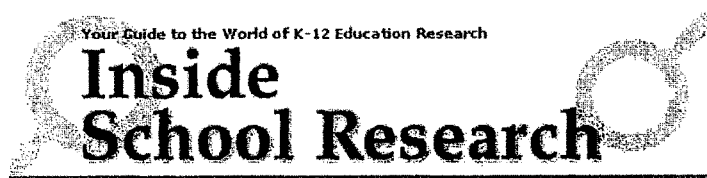
Opponents of government subsidies for private schools offer objections that generally fall into one of several categories: they are constitutionally suspect, they undermine public schools, they do not have broad public support, costs will go up over time, academic benefits aren't real, and private schools would accept the only the best students. All of these arguments have some validity, all are readily rebutted, they come principally from people who benefit from a monopoly on public funding for education, and none of those who make them offer satisfactory answers to two fundamental questions: why shouldn't parents have substantial say over where and how their children are educated, and why after all these years and all this money are so many of our inner city schools still so bad?

Of course better off parents have a great deal of say in their choice of schools. It is the deciding factor for many of us in where we live. Those of us who can afford it can and often do opt for private schools at our own expense, many of them parochial, not always

from our own denomination. Sidwell Friends is a Quaker school, about as far as one can imagine from the Black Liberation Theology of the Obama's former church in Chicago. As always, it is the poor who are left to suffer.

That should be of particular concern for Catholics. If nothing else our Church is consistent in reminding us of our responsibilities toward the needy. Beyond the necessities of life, food, shelter and clothing, few things are more important for dignity and spiritual growth than an adequate education. It is a fundamental human right. To deny it to millions of our citizens is unconscionable. To condemn so many children to failing schools is an act of oppression. As Christians and citizens of a representative democracy we have a compelling moral obligation to speak out. Our Bishops are correct. Parents have a fundamental right to choose. We should all demand they get it.

## EDUCATION WEEK



Veteran reporter Debra Viadero has written more than 1,400 stories for *Education Week* and most of them have been about research. Not bored yet, she translates, shares, and dissects research findings on schools and learning, along with news about education research, for audiences that extend far beyond the Ivory Tower.

### D.C. Voucher Students Begin to Nudge Ahead

The blogs were buzzing over the weekend with the latest findings from the federal evaluation of the District of Columbia's Opportunity Scholarship Program. You can catch some of the chatter [here](#) and [here](#). Also, see the full story on EdWeek's homepage today.

Begun in 2004, the program attracts notice because it's the first federally funded school voucher program in the United States and it's up for renewal. In the first two years of the study, though, the federally funded researchers found the voucher students were not doing any better academically than those who had applied for—but failed to nab—one of the "golden tickets" in the voucher lottery.

Not so this year. According to the third-year findings released Friday by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, voucher students were scoring more than three months ahead of their voucher-less peers in reading. There were still no differences between the two groups, though, in terms of math achievement. The program also had no impact on the group of students for whom it was intended: students transferring from schools deemed to be in need of improvement.

What's missing from all the media coverage, though, is the fact that this study is another one of the randomized controlled studies that the IES has been rolling out in recent years. If you've read my story on this spate of research, you'll know that most of those studies are finding few, if any, program effects. So the fact that the D.C. program is beginning to yield positive academic results may be especially noteworthy.

On the other hand, the third-year evaluation also shows that the voucher recipients were doing only slightly better in reading than the much smaller group of students who received a voucher, but decided not to use it. Go figure.



## And what happens to results showing school choice works?

*By Patrick McIlheran of the Journal Sentinel*  
Apr. 6, 2009

Well, if it's in the hands of a federal government hostile to the idea, it gets covered up, suggest the editorialists at the Wall Street Journal.

Take a look at the decision of Education Secretary Arne Duncan, the editorialists note, to sit on the results of a review of the school voucher program in the District of Columbia even as Congress was deciding the program's fate in March.

The Journal writes:

"The latest annual evaluation was finally released Friday, and it shows measurable academic gains. The Opportunity Scholarship Program provides \$7,500 vouchers to 1,700 low-income families in D.C. to send their children to private schools. Ninety-nine percent of the children are black or Hispanic, and there are more than four applicants for each scholarship.

"The 2008 report demonstrated progress among certain subgroups of children but not everyone. This year's report shows statistically significant academic gains for the entire voucher-receiving population. Children attending private schools with the aid of the scholarships are reading nearly a half-grade ahead of their peers who did not receive vouchers. Voucher recipients are doing no better in math but they're doing no worse. Which means that no voucher participant is in worse academic shape than before, and many students are much better off.

" 'There are transition difficulties, a culture shock upon entering a school where you're expected to pay attention, learn, do homework,' says Jay Greene, an education scholar at the Manhattan Institute. 'But these results fit a pattern that we've seen in other evaluations of vouchers. Benefits compound over time.'"

That last point, incidentally, was one made by the independent researchers doing a five-year study of school choice in Milwaukee: It takes time to show results.

But the Washington program has no more time, having been killed by Congress – even as the Obama administration apparently kept mum on results that would have showed its effectiveness. The students were tested in the spring, the results analyzed in the summer and the preliminary findings given to the team working with the Department of Education in November. Why, then, didn't the department chime in when Congress was ending choice?

The Journal:

"The decision to let 1,700 poor kids get tossed from private schools is a moral disgrace. It also exposes the ugly politics that lies beneath union and liberal efforts across the country to undermine mayoral control, charter schools, vouchers or any reform that threatens their monopoly over public education dollars and jobs. The Sheldon Silver-Dick Durbin Democrats aren't worried that school choice doesn't work. They're worried that it does, and if Messrs. Obama and Duncan want to succeed as reformers they need to say so consistently."

**THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.**  
WSJ.com

REVIEW & OUTLOOK APRIL 5, 2009, 9:42 P.M. ET

## Democrats and Poor Kids

*Sitting on evidence of voucher success, and the battle of New York.*

Education Secretary Arne Duncan did a public service last week when he visited New York City and spoke up for charter schools and mayoral control of education. That was the reformer talking. The status quo Mr. Duncan was on display last month when he let Congress kill a District of Columbia voucher program even as he was sitting on evidence of its success.

In New York City with its 1.1 million students, mayoral control has resulted in better test scores and graduation rates, while expanding charter schools, which means more and better education choices for low-income families. But mayoral control expires in June unless state lawmakers renew it, and the United Federation of Teachers is working with Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver to weaken or kill it.

President Obama's stimulus is sending some \$100 billion to the nation's school districts. What will he demand in return? The state budget passed by the New York legislature last week freezes funding for charters but increases it by more than \$400 million for other public schools. Perhaps a visit to a charter school in Harlem would help Mr. Obama honor his reform pledge. "I'm looking at the data here in front of me," Mr. Duncan told the New York Post. "Graduation rates are up. Test scores are up. Teacher salaries are up. Social promotion was eliminated. Dramatically increasing parental choice. That's real progress."

Mr. Duncan's help in New York is in stark contrast to his department's decision to sit on a performance review of the D.C. voucher program while Congress debated its future in March. The latest annual evaluation was finally released Friday, and it shows measurable academic gains. The Opportunity Scholarship Program provides \$7,500 vouchers to 1,700 low-income families in D.C. to send their children to private schools. Ninety-nine percent of the children are black or Hispanic, and there are more than four applicants for each scholarship.

The 2008 report demonstrated progress among certain subgroups of children but not everyone. This year's report shows statistically significant academic gains for the entire voucher-receiving population. Children attending private schools with the aid of the scholarships are reading nearly a half-grade ahead of their peers who did not receive vouchers. Voucher recipients are doing no better in math but they're doing no worse. Which means that no voucher participant is in worse academic shape than before, and many students are much better off.

"There are transition difficulties, a culture shock upon entering a school where you're expected to pay attention, learn, do homework," says Jay Greene, an education scholar at the Manhattan Institute. "But these results fit a pattern that we've seen in other evaluations of vouchers. Benefits compound over time."

It's bad enough that Democrats are killing a program that parents love and is closing the achievement gap between poor minorities and whites. But as scandalous is that the Education Department almost certainly knew the results of this evaluation for months.

Voucher recipients were tested last spring. The scores were analyzed in the late summer and early fall, and in November preliminary results were presented to a team of advisers who work with the Education Department to produce the annual evaluation. Since Education officials are intimately involved in this process, they had to

know what was in this evaluation even as Democrats passed (and Mr. Obama signed) language that ends the program after next year.

Opponents of school choice for poor children have long claimed they'd support vouchers if there was evidence that they work. While running for President last year, Mr. Obama told the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel that if he saw more proof that they were successful, he would "not allow my predisposition to stand in the way of making sure that our kids can learn . . . You do what works for the kids." Except, apparently, when what works is opposed by unions.

Mr. Duncan's office spurned our repeated calls and emails asking what and when he and his aides knew about these results. We do know the Administration prohibited anyone involved with the evaluation from discussing it publicly. You'd think we were talking about nuclear secrets, not about a taxpayer-funded pilot program. A reasonable conclusion is that Mr. Duncan's department didn't want proof of voucher success to interfere with Senator Dick Durbin's campaign to kill vouchers at the behest of the teachers unions.

The decision to let 1,700 poor kids get tossed from private schools is a moral disgrace. It also exposes the ugly politics that lies beneath union and liberal efforts across the country to undermine mayoral control, charter schools, vouchers or any reform that threatens their monopoly over public education dollars and jobs. The Sheldon Silver-Dick Durbin Democrats aren't worried that school choice doesn't work. They're worried that it does, and if Messrs. Obama and Duncan want to succeed as reformers they need to say so consistently.

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## The Washington Post

### Don't Pull the Plug Yet

An evaluation of D.C.'s school voucher program suggests it has helped students. But more study is needed.

Saturday, April 4, 2009; A14

THE INK WAS barely dry on the latest study of D.C. school vouchers when Education Secretary Arne Duncan announced that he is ready to pull the plug on the program, although he doesn't want current students moved. The study's findings are no slam-dunk for the program's success, but they are, by no means, proof of failure. Indeed, for the first time, researchers found statistically significant improvement in reading test scores for students offered vouchers and that, at the very least, demands further study.

An evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program released yesterday concluded that, after three years, students offered scholarships earned reading scores equivalent to 3.1 months of additional learning. It also mirrored earlier studies in showing that parents who had children in the program were more satisfied with the schools, viewing them as safer and more orderly. The study found no difference in math performance and no gains for students from the lowest-performing public schools.

It's no surprise that partisans on both sides of the debate over the nation's only federal voucher program will seize on the mixed bag of findings to buttress their political points of view. We had hoped that Mr. Duncan, who prides himself in being a pragmatist interested in programs that work, would have a more open mind. For one thing, this report -- while carefully calibrated as a scientific study -- has limitations in that it does not compare the performance of students who use vouchers to attend private schools against the performance of students in the city's public and charter schools. Instead, it compares students who were "offered" scholarships against those who weren't. It makes sense to want to do further study before rendering a verdict on the efficacy of vouchers.

So it's perplexing that Mr. Duncan, without any further discussion or analysis, would be so quick to kill a program that is supported by local officials and that has proven popular with parents. Unless, of course, politics enters the calculation in the form of Democratic allies in Congress who have been shameless in their efforts to kill vouchers. Most recently, they inserted language in the omnibus budget bill that cuts off funding after the next school year unless Congress and the District government reauthorize the program.

We've made no secret of our support for vouchers. They are no substitute for serious public school reform, but they give low-income, mostly minority, parents what wealthier people take for granted: a choice in where their children go to school. Still, we agree that the program should be judged on its merits. The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, under the leadership of Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman (I-Conn.) and Sen. Susan M. Collins (R-Maine), has scheduled hearings for May. Mr. Duncan might want to watch.

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# The Washington Times

## HENTOFF: Obama's shameful silence

Time for the 'education president' to take lesson on choice

By Nat Hentoff | Monday, March 30, 2009

### COMMENTARY:

President Obama's huge stimulus bill includes about \$100 billion for education. And he insists his criteria for supporting reforms is not "whether an idea is liberal or conservative, but whether it works."

Applauding, Randi Weingarten, powerful head of the American Federation of Teachers (1.4 million members), calls Mr. Obama the "education president." However, when congressional Democrats recently doomed the Opportunity Scholarship Program for poor children in the District, the education president didn't say a word.

Of the 1,700 students, starting in kindergarten, in this private-school voucher program, 90 percent are black and 9 percent are Hispanic. First the House and then the Senate inserted into the \$410 billion omnibus spending bill language that will eliminate the \$7,500 annual scholarships for these poor children after the next school year. It could only be reauthorized by the same Democratic-controlled Congress and the anti-voucher D.C. Council. Fat chance!

A key OSP executioner in the Senate was Sen. Richard J. Durbin of Illinois. I have written admiringly of Mr. Durbin's concern for human rights abroad and his trenchant criticism of the CIA's rendition-to-torture history. How about education rights in the nation's capital?

Andrew J. Coulson, director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, supplies the answer. (I am a senior fellow, specializing in civil liberties and education at Cato.) Mr. Coulson wrote in the Feb. 26 New York Post:

"Because they saw it as a threat to their political power, Democrats in Washington appear willing to extinguish the dreams of a few thousand poor kids to protect their political base." Teachers' unions are a vital part of that base, many of whose members fear competition. Not all of them. Ms. Weingarten, who is also head of New York's United Federation of Teachers, has started UFT charter schools in that state. But, like Mr. Obama, she is silent about stripping these OSP children of their alternatives. And the largest teachers union, the National Education Association, urged Congress to kill the D.C. program.

Two of these children, Sarah and James Parker, attend Washington's prestigious Sidwell Friends School. At the end of the next school year and the end of their scholarships, among the classmates they'll be leaving are Sasha and Malia Obama - who, of course, do not need voucher money.

As New York Times columnist David Brooks noted March 19, the congressional Democrats "even refused to grandfather in the kids already in the [voucher] program, so those children will be ripped away from their mentors and friends. ... Obama has, in fact, been shamefully quiet about this."

Doesn't Mr. Obama at least have something to say publicly to those children and their parents - especially when his own education secretary, Arne Duncan (enthusiastically appointed by Mr. Obama), disagrees with the congressional Democrats shutting down these Opportunity Scholarships?

The March 6 New York Post quoted Mr. Duncan: "I don't think it makes sense to take kids out of a school where they're happy and safe and satisfied and learning. I think those kids need to stay in their school." Even if the program - as is quite certain - is not reauthorized after the next school year, Mr. Duncan suggests that donors concerned with education provide financial aid to those children through graduations.

Perhaps our education president, from his continuing royalties from the sale of his books, such as "The Audacity of Hope," might help out. I suspect Ms. Weingarten would not object.

Says one of the recipients of the Opportunity Scholarships, teenager Carlos Battle (Voices-OfSchoolChoice.org): "If I was in the public school, I'd have to think more about protecting myself than about learning."

Sidwell Friends School's headmaster, Bruce Stewart, told William McGurn of the Wall Street Journal (reprinted in the March 4 New York Post) that the school has welcomed the OSP students, pointing out that when parents get more educational choices for their children, this benefits not only the children who are admitted but also the community.

In that New York Post article, "O's dilemma: School kids vs. his fellow Democrats," Virginia Walden-Ford, executive director of D.C. Parents for School Choice, has an excellent suggestion for members of the White House press corps: "I'd like to see a reporter stand up at one of those nationally televised press conferences and ask President Obama what he thinks about what his own party is doing to keep two innocent kids from attending the same school where he sends his?"

I wish Jay Leno had thought to ask Mr. Obama that question.

In a March 2 editorial, The Washington Post, not a conservative newspaper, says the debate about this vanishing opportunity for poor children "isn't about facts. It's about politics and the stranglehold the teachers unions have on the Democratic Party. Why else has so much time and effort gone into trying to kill off what, in the grand scheme of government spending, is a tiny program?"

If you agree, Mr. Obama, maybe you can help get the Opportunity Scholarship Program reauthorized after the next school year. Why not? The Democrats in Congress may listen to you.

*Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights. He is a member of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press and a senior fellow at the Cato Institute.*

# The Washington Post

## The City's Children Need Opportunities

By: Joseph E. Robert

Sunday, March 29, 2009; C07

Walls are usually constructed with two things in mind: to keep people in or to keep people out. Sometimes both. When it comes to low-income children in Washington, the last thing we should be doing is building walls to cut them off from educational opportunities.

Unfortunately, that is exactly what Congress seems intent on doing. Recently enacted legislation would put up unprecedented barriers that are intended to kill the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. They would disrupt the education of more than 1,700 of Washington's most disadvantaged children and deny the opportunity to thousands more in the future. This is an outrageous position, particularly from politicians who have the means to provide what they see as the best educational opportunity for their children - many in schools alongside scholarship students.

They are ignoring evidence that the program is working. Studies have shown that parents are more involved in their child's education, that children have an increased enthusiasm for school and that families want the program to continue. Initial results show that after less than two years, children who received a scholarship have higher math and reading test scores. More comprehensive results of the congressionally mandated study are due this spring, but Congress has shown its true motives by trying to kill this popular program before all the evidence is in.

Politicians must be held accountable. They may try to say that they are not killing the program or that they won't disrupt current scholarship recipients, but those are just smoke screens. The legislation they passed creates unprecedented barriers for this program, while in the same bill funding other programs for which there is no evidence of effectiveness. And denying opportunities for tomorrow's children is just as bad as ripping them away from current students. One cannot help but be left with a bad taste from the hypocrisy of it all.

While Congress has put up these walls, President Obama and D.C. Mayor Adrian M. Fenty must speak up. Fenty has told me and many others that he supports the continuation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, a program that was requested by his predecessor, Anthony Williams, as part of a three-sector package to improve all D.C. schools. Obama should remind Congress that he wants to move beyond the tired political arguments of the past and focus on results -- and therefore reauthorize the scholarship program. Leaders who stand silently by only condone the actions of those who are trying to eliminate the program.

Right now, some families in Washington are feeling pride and joy from acceptance letters received from private schools. These families all share the desire to find the right school for their child. Why, then, would we build walls so that only the privileged few can actually attend the school of their choice?

The future leaders of Washington and possibly the nation desperately need educational opportunities that will help them succeed. The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program is one of those opportunities. We should be finding ways to expand that opportunity, not building walls to keep it away from those who need it most.

*The writer is chairman and chief executive of J.E. Robert Cos. and a member of the board of DC Children First.*

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## Why We Must Fight for School Choice

Giving up would be a big step backwards for D.C.'s children.

By Virginia Walden Ford

March 27, 2009, 4:00 AM

Real change in American politics can seem impossible. Historically, some of our most desperately needed changes have faced the longest odds.

Those of us who grew up during the civil-rights era can appreciate the importance of courage and persistence in facing the biggest challenges. Imagine how different our country would be today if the marchers in Selma had stopped in their tracks — knowing the opposition that awaited them on the bridge to Montgomery — or if Mrs. Parks had given up her seat.

Every generation owes a debt of gratitude to those who came before and fought to make things right. And we can try to pay that debt by fighting to right the wrongs of our time.

In 2009, few wrongs are greater than the inequality that endures in American education. More than a half century after the Supreme Court rejected segregation in our nation's schools, minority children are still less likely to receive a quality education.

Here in the nation's capital, generations of children have passed through the District's public schools without being prepared to succeed in life. Historically, they have been told by the government which school to attend, and if that school wasn't good, they have been told by politicians that reform was underway and things would be better soon.

But these promises have never materialized. Today the District continues to have one of the lowest-performing school systems in the country. Barely half of the students in the District graduate from high school. Standardized tests show that most D.C. kids aren't mastering even the most basic skills in reading and math.

Across the District, parents recognize that their children deserve better. Some of these families are fortunate enough to have more options, thanks to charter schools and open enrollment. But too many continue to be denied the opportunity to choose a good school for their children. Just ask the parents of the thousands of kids on charter-school waiting lists, and those whose out-of-boundary placement requests were denied.

In 2003, DC Parents for School Choice rallied hundreds of parents from across the District to do something about it. We organized behind a simple idea — that low-income families should have the power to choose the best school for their children. From the start, we knew we faced long odds, but we headed to Capitol Hill anyway.

In a town of lobbyists, walking the halls of Congress may not seem like an adventure, but for our parents, it was an important journey — the first real chance they'd had to make their voices heard. Office by office, we told our stories. We talked about the problems our kids were having in the public schools. We explained why they deserved something better. We heard the word “no” more times than I'd like to remember. But we never gave up, because we remembered what was at stake.

In 2004, our dreams were fulfilled. By a close vote, Congress passed the D.C. School Choice Incentive Act, which created a new school-voucher program to help low-income families choose private schools for their children (along with providing more federal funding for traditional public and charter schools).

Over the past five years, the scholarship program has provided hope to thousands of families. Now parents are more optimistic about their children's futures; they are in safe schools where they receive quality instruction. Children who started two or three grade-levels behind are now catching up and planning for college. The program is so popular that the Washington Scholarship Fund, which administers the program, has received about four applications for each available scholarship.

Despite this success, many lawmakers in Congress are now talking about ending the program. Parents can't understand why. Most don't follow politics. But they see their children making progress, and they want them to stay in their good schools. And they think those students' little brothers and sisters — and their neighbors' children — deserve the same opportunities.

Now even some school-choice supporters, including the *Washington Post*'s Jay Mathews in a recent column, are counseling us to give up. Even though we are right, he says, and have moral authority on our side, the political resistance is just too strong. The odds are too long.

But we understand that giving up isn't an option. And so we will continue to fight until all children, regardless of background, can receive a good education. Our children — and future generations — deserve nothing less.

— *Virginia Walden Ford is the executive director of DC Parents for School Choice.*

# The Washington Post

## Vouchers on the Line

Let an upcoming evaluation prove their worth

Saturday, March 14, 2009, A14

IN A MAJOR speech this week outlining his vision for education, President Obama exhorted Washington to get beyond partisanship and petty bickering and to forgo old debates for ideas that really work for children. It's exactly the right sentiment and one Congress should embrace in deciding the future of the D.C. voucher program and 1,700 children from low-income families enrolled in it.

Congress, as part of the omnibus spending bill, cut off federal funding for the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program after the 2009-10 school year unless separate reauthorization legislation is passed. The District also must vote its approval of the program, which provides stipends of up to \$7,500 for students to attend private schools. No doubt critics hope that these hurdles will kill off the nation's only program of federally funded vouchers. But further debate, with congressional hearings, offers the opportunity for impartial and comprehensive evaluation of a program started as an experiment five years ago.

Both sides need to put aside the overheated rhetoric that too often accompanies any mention of vouchers and focus instead on the facts. Supporters can point out that the program was not imposed on an unwilling city by an overbearing Republican administration and Congress. Rather, it was sought and enthusiastically supported by then-Mayor Anthony A. Williams (D), by the head of the school board and by other local Democrats. Contrary to myth, the program does not drain scarce dollars from needy public schools but is part of a three-sector approach to education reform under which additional money -- to the tune of about \$129 million over the last five years -- has been directed to D.C. public and charter schools. Moreover, it is unclear what exactly would happen to those federal funds for public and charter schools if vouchers were to be eliminated.

Nonetheless, critics are right to want to know whether vouchers are effective in improving the achievement of their poor, minority recipients and, as such, are a good use of federal tax dollars. There is strong anecdotal evidence from parents of students receiving scholarships that their children feel safer and more secure, are better motivated and work harder in their new schools. Perhaps the most critical factor, though, in an evaluation of success lies with the results due this spring from the U.S. Education Department's ongoing scientific study of the program. No matter what one's predisposition towards vouchers is, it would be foolhardy not to study -- and learn from -- these findings.

Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman (I-Conn.), whose Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs has jurisdiction over the District, has announced plans to hold hearings this spring. Congress dare not delay. Parents with children in the program and those who want to enroll need to know what the future holds. No matter what the verdict, we hope that Congress at least has the decency not to force children already in the program to leave schools that work for them.



## The New York Times

### 'No Picnic for Me Either'

By: David Brooks  
Thursday, March 12, 2009

In his education speech this week, Barack Obama retold a by-now familiar story. When he was a boy, his mother would wake him up at 4:30 to tutor him for a few hours before he went off to school. When young Barry complained about getting up so early, his mother responded: "This is no picnic for me either, Buster."

That experience was the perfect preparation for reforming American education because it underlines the two traits necessary for academic success: relationships and rigor. The young Obama had a loving relationship with an adult passionate about his future. He also had at least one teacher, his mom, disinclined to put up with any crap.

The reform vision Obama sketched out in his speech flows from that experience. The Obama approach would make it more likely that young Americans grow up in relationships with teaching adults. It would expand nurse visits to disorganized homes. It would improve early education. It would extend the school year. Most important, it would increase merit pay for good teachers (the ones who develop emotional bonds with students) and dismiss bad teachers (the ones who treat students like cattle to be processed).

We've spent years working on ways to restructure schools, but what matters most is the relationship between one student and one teacher. You ask a kid who has graduated from high school to list the teachers who mattered in his life, and he will reel off names. You ask a kid who dropped out, and he will not even understand the question. Relationships like that are beyond his experience.

In his speech, Obama actually put more emphasis on the other side of the equation: rigor. In this context, that means testing and accountability.

Thanks in part to No Child Left Behind, we're a lot better at measuring each student's progress. Today, tests can tell you which students are on track and which aren't. They can tell you which teachers are bringing their students' achievement up by two grades in a single year and which are bringing their students' levels up by only half a grade. They can tell you which education schools produce good teachers and which do not.

New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein has data showing that progress on tests between the third and eighth grades powerfully predicts high school graduation rates years later — a clear demonstration of the importance of these assessments.

The problem is that as our ability to get data has improved, the education establishment's ability to evade the consequences of data has improved, too. Most districts don't use data to reward good teachers. States have watered down their proficiency standards so parents think their own schools are much better than they are.

As Education Secretary Arne Duncan told me, "We've seen a race to the bottom. States are lying to children. They are lying to parents. They're ignoring failure, and that's unacceptable. We have to be fierce."

Obama's goal is to make sure results have consequences. He praises data sets that "tell us which students had which teachers so we can assess what's working and what's not." He also aims to reward states that use data to make decisions. He will build on a Bush program that gives states money for merit pay so long as they measure teachers based on real results. He will reward states that expand charter schools, which are drivers of innovation, so long as they use data to figure out which charters are working.

The administration also will give money to states like Massachusetts that have rigorous proficiency standards. The goal is to replace the race to the bottom with a race to the top, as states are compelled to raise their standards if they hope to get federal money.

In short, Obama hopes to change incentives so districts do the effective and hard things instead of the easy and mediocre things. The question is whether he has the courage to follow through. Many doubt he does. They point to the way the president has already caved in on the D.C. vouchers case.

Democrats in Congress just killed an experiment that gives 1,700 poor Washington kids school vouchers. They even refused to grandfather in the kids already in the program, so those children will be ripped away from their mentors and friends. The idea was to cause maximum suffering, and 58 Senators voted for it.

Obama has, in fact, been shamefully quiet about this. But in the next weeks he'll at least try to protect the kids now in the program. And more broadly, there's reason for hope. Education is close to his heart. He has broken with liberal orthodoxy on school reform more than any other policy. He's naturally inclined to be data driven. There's reason to think that this week's impressive speech will be followed by real and potentially historic action.

## The Washington Times

### COULSON: Congress vs. D.C. kids

By Andrew Coulson | Thursday, March 12, 2009

Congressional Democrats succeeded this week in crippling a school choice program operating in the nation's capital. For the last five years, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarships have made private schooling affordable to 1,700 poor children. Rather than reauthorizing the program for another five-year term, Democrats have all but ensured it will die after next year.

House Appropriations Committee Chairman David R. Obey, Wisconsin Democrat, has asked D.C. Public Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee to prepare for the return of voucher students to the city's broken public schools.

Sen. Ted Kennedy's office claims the senator opposed the voucher program from the start because it "takes funds from very needy public schools to send students to unaccountable private schools." (The House Budget Committee holds hearings today on the U.S. Education Department budget).

But just how needy are D.C. public schools? To find out, I added up all the K-12-related expenditures in the current D.C. budget, excluding preschool, higher-education and charter school items. The total comes to \$1.29 billion. Divide that by the official enrollment count of 48,646 students, and it yields a total per-pupil spending figure of \$26,555.

To put that number in context, it's about \$2,000 more per student than the average tuition actually paid at Sidwell Friends, the prestigious school President Obama's daughters attend. And it is more than fourfold the \$5,928 average tuition charged last year by the private schools serving voucher students.

What's more, the Opportunity Scholarship program does not take a dime away from D.C. public schools. On the contrary, the program brings with it an additional \$13 million annually for the public schools - as part of a "sweetener" deal required to gain local and Democratic support at the time of its passage in 2004. Democrats apparently believe that a city with a \$1.29 billion education honey pot requires an extra \$13 million sweetener.

Needless to say, all that money does little good. The voucher students perform at least as well as public school students academically, and voucher parents are significantly happier with their chosen private schools than public school parents are with theirs, according to the Education Department's official report on the program released last year.

What, then, is the real reason congressional leadership wants to kick these kids out of the private schools they love, and back into public schools? How can they turn a deaf ear to the YouTube videos of voucher-receiving students beseeching them to preserve the program? There is only one plausible explanation: They see the program as a threat to the public school employee unions at the core of their party.

If allowed to continue, these Opportunity Scholarships will keep reminding voters that independent and parochial schools are more efficient and responsive to parents than public schooling. That might accelerate the spread of private school choice programs around the country. But while two-thirds of public school employees are union members, only about 7 percent of the private sector work force belongs to a union. Many in Congress have apparently done this math, and fear the effect of real private school choice on their political futures.

That analysis is dangerously shortsighted. The D.C. program is just one among dozens of private school choice programs operating around the country. These education tax credits and vouchers have been growing steadily, and there's no reason to expect that will stop. Congress is thus standing in front of a massive dike that is springing leaks. They have jammed their fingers into the hole that has arisen in D.C. for now. But the others will continue to widen and proliferate.

Other than pressure from the teachers' unions, supporting school choice might be easier for opposing legislators than they think. Voucher programs cannot be constitutionally enacted at the federal level outside the District of Columbia. So all congressional leadership needs to do is allow the D.C. program to continue and offer moral support to their party colleagues at the state level who have increasingly begun to support education tax credit programs. And they can rightly cite Democratic statesman Daniel Patrick Moynihan - who supported education tax credits as far back as the 1970s - as an early leader in the movement.

But if they continue with their current tactics, our union-inspired Congress will soon find itself on the wrong side of history as the demand for choice in education grows louder.

*Andrew Coulson is director of the Center for Educational Freedom at the Cato Institute.*

**THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.**

WSJ.com

REVIEW &amp; OUTLOOK MARCH 9, 2009

**Obama and the Schools***It's time to stand up to the teacher's unions.*

Education Secretary Arne Duncan said last week that poor children receiving federally financed vouchers to attend private schools in Washington, D.C., shouldn't be forced out of those schools. Bully for Mr. Duncan. But the voice that matters most is President Obama's, and so far he's been shouting at zero decibels.

His silence is an all-clear for Democrats in Congress who have put language in the omnibus spending bill that would effectively end the program after next year. Should they succeed, 1,700 mostly black and Hispanic students who use the vouchers would return to the notoriously violent and underperforming D.C. public school system, which spends more money per pupil than almost any city in the nation yet graduates only about half of its students.

The D.C. voucher program has more than four applicants for every available slot. Parental satisfaction is sky high. And independent evaluations -- another is scheduled for release later this month -- show that children in the program perform better academically than their peers who do not receive vouchers. This is the kind of school reform that the federal government should encourage and expand.

The Senate hasn't yet approved the spending measure, and there's nothing stopping the popular President from asking Democratic leaders to reconsider their voucher phase-out. Mr. Obama signed a stimulus bill last month that spends some \$100 billion on education. But by not asking unions for anything in return for the money, he missed an historic reform opportunity. This time he could at least publicly back Mr. Duncan and D.C. Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee, who's also expressed concern that ending the program would relegate low-income kids to failing schools.

It's no surprise that the Obamas opted out of D.C. public schools for their own daughters and instead chose an exclusive private institution. Come on, Mr. President, find your voice for families of lesser means.

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chicagotribune.com Chicago Tribune

## A cruel school move

March 9, 2009

We wrote last week about Democratic efforts to strip 1,900 low-income Washington children of \$7,500 "opportunity scholarships" to attend private schools.

It's an experiment in school vouchers, an experiment with little potential downside. But it's an experiment that was launched in 2004 by a Republican-controlled Congress. Today it's on the verge of extinction because the Democratic-controlled Congress wants to do the bidding of public-school teachers unions. The unions see vouchers that let poor kids go to private schools as aiding the enemy.

Language passed by the House as part of a massive \$410 billion spending bill would effectively doom the federally funded program. The 1,900 kids would have to leave their schools and re-enter public schools in Washington, which has some of the worst schools in the nation.

The measure, by the way, is referred to as "the Durbin language" for sponsoring Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois.

The Democrats' point is not to save money—at \$14 million a year, the effort represents a trivial share of the budget. The point is to prevent the spread of vouchers.

A few days ago, Education Secretary Arne Duncan raised some doubts about the Democrats' efforts. "I don't think vouchers ultimately are the answer," Duncan told the Associated Press. But, he admitted, "I don't think it makes sense to take kids out of a school where they're happy and safe and satisfied and learning."

Maybe Duncan was persuaded by a Wall Street Journal op-ed that introduced the nation to Sarah and James Parker, two African-American children who, without the vouchers, could not continue to go to Sidwell Friends School. That's the school attended by President Obama's daughters, whose parents can afford the full tuition.

If Duncan can prevail on Durbin and his fellow Democrats, the Parkers and other recipients will get to stay where they are.

But that won't help other children who are not yet in the program and will be consigned to the public schools.

Most members of Congress don't face this grim prospect. They can afford private schools and many take advantage of the option: A 2007 report by the Heritage Foundation found that 37 percent of House members and 45 percent of senators send their children to private schools.

Duncan agrees it would be cruel to deny current scholarship kids the chance to attend "a school where they're happy and safe and satisfied and learning." So wouldn't it be cruel to deny that to kids in the future?

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## PUTTING UNIONS FIRST

March 9, 2009

The US Senate can vote today to ensure that 1,700 Washington, DC, schoolkids have continued access to educational excellence.

But will it do the right thing?

Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) slipped language into the \$410 billion omnibus spending bill that would essentially eliminate federally funded Opportunity Scholarships after next year.

The program provides low-income DC families with a \$7,500 voucher that they can use to enroll their child in a private school such as Sidwell Friends, which graduated Chelsea Clinton and now enrolls Malia and Sasha Obama.

As Bill McGurn noted in The Post recently, the Democrats' glee to end this program "points to perhaps the most odious of double standards in American life today: the way some of our loudest champions of public education vote to keep other people's children - mostly inner-city blacks and Latinos - trapped in schools where they'd never let their own kids set foot."

It's fair to debate whether vouchers are the best answer, but there's no question that low-income families need alternatives to the traditional public-school system.

Just as charter schools have proven in New York and around the country.

But to a Democratic Party totally beholden to teachers unions, DC Opportunity Scholarships look like a threat. Hence the Durbin language - snuck into the spending bill.

At the very least, the issue should be taken up separately, and at a later date. To that end, the Senate should vote today for an amendment from Sen. John Ensign (R-Nev.) that strikes Durbin's measure from the bill.

Sadly, New York's senators would rather see this education option for DC kids shut down: Both Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand intend to vote against the Ensign amendment.

This will please the teachers unions.

# The Washington Post

## Fenty, MIA on Vouchers

By: Mark Thissen

Wednesday, February 25, 2009; A18

Eight days after President Obama took the oath of office, another, less noted inauguration took place in our nation's capital -- when Mayor Adrian Fenty swore in Ronald Holassie as deputy youth mayor for legislative affairs. Holassie is a 10th-grader at Archbishop Carroll High School, where he is thriving -- running track, studying physics, mentoring middle school students and attending meetings of the Mayor's Youth Cabinet. He loves Archbishop Carroll. "If I didn't have this school," he recently told Washington's Catholic Standard, "I wouldn't be here at this point. I wouldn't be the deputy youth mayor."

But unless Mayor Fenty persuades Congress to change course, Holassie may not get to finish his senior year at Archbishop Carroll. His family can afford tuition at the Catholic high school only because of the voucher he receives from the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. And congressional Democrats have included a "poison pill" in the omnibus spending bill before the Senate this week that could kill the scholarship program after the 2009-10 school year. If the bill passes in its current form, Holassie and more than 1,700 District students could lose scholarships of up to \$7,500 that allow them to attend private or parochial schools of their parents' choice. The average household income of students in the program is \$22,736 -- which puts these schools out of the students' reach without the federal aid.

The program was set up in 2004 with the strong support of Mayor Anthony Williams, who vocally championed D.C. Opportunity Scholarships in the halls of Congress. By contrast, Mayor Fenty has been a study in silence.

The mayor's failure to speak out in defense of the program has been killing it. With Democrats in control of Congress, the mayor could have launched a lobbying effort to save the scholarships -- making calls, meeting with senators, raising the stakes on behalf of poor D.C. families. But he has failed to lead. And his inaction has sent the wrong signal to Capitol Hill -- creating the impression that he does not care whether the program survives.

Stepping into the leadership vacuum are Sens. John Ensign (R-Nev.) and Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.), who have introduced a bipartisan amendment to strip the poison-pill language from the omnibus bill. Democratic leaders initially refused to allow their amendment to come up for a vote but have scheduled it to come to the Senate floor next week.

With a vote pending, the mayor finally issued a tepid statement last night: "Political leaders can debate the merits of vouchers, but we should not disrupt the education of



children who are presently enrolled in private schools through the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program."

This is at least in contrast to congressional Democrats, who issued report language accompanying the bill instructing District schools to prepare students with D.C. Opportunity Scholarships to reenroll in the public school system after the 2009-10 school year. But the mayor said nothing about the thousands of students who want to apply in the future. There are four applications for every available scholarship. Will the mayor speak up for these students as well? His statement will be taken by congressional Democrats as a green light to kill the program once current participants graduate.

If congressional Democrats prevail and the program is shut down, 85 percent of scholarship students would be forced to attend low-performing schools in the District. The hypocrisy is palpable. A 2003 Heritage Foundation survey found that while only 10 percent of American students attend private schools, 41 percent of congressmen and 46 percent of senators responded that they had sent their children to private schools. President Obama himself passed up the District's public schools and sent his daughters to prestigious Sidwell Friends. Two Sidwell students will lose their Opportunity Scholarships if Congress kills the program. There is nothing wrong with choosing the best possible school for your children -- but doing so while denying that choice to poor D.C. students is shameful.

Ronald Holassie has made education his top priority as deputy youth mayor -- and his efforts have made an impression. Former mayor Williams recently said, "Ronald is one example of a student who is doing well and realizes how important it is that he speak up - not only for himself but for children in D.C. who would like the same opportunity."

Those children need Mayor Fenty to speak up as well.

*The writer, a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution, served in senior positions at the White House and the Pentagon from 2001 to 2009, most recently as chief speechwriter for President George W. Bush. His wife works for Sen. John Ensign as staff director for the Senate Republican Policy Committee.*

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**THE WALL STREET JOURNAL**  
WSJ.com

OPINION: MAIN STREET MARCH 3, 2009

## Will Obama Stand Up for These Kids?

By WILLIAM MCGURN

Dick Durbin has a nasty surprise for two of Sasha and Malia Obama's new schoolmates. And it puts the president in an awkward position.

The children are Sarah and James Parker. Like the Obama girls, Sarah and James attend the Sidwell Friends School in our nation's capital. Unlike the Obama girls, they could not afford the school without the \$7,500 voucher they receive from the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program. Unfortunately, a spending bill the Senate takes up this week includes a poison pill that would kill this program -- and with it perhaps the Parker children's hopes for a Sidwell diploma.



*Sarah and James Parker attend Sidwell Friends School with the president's daughters, thanks to a voucher program Sen. Dick Durbin wants to end.*

Known as the "Durbin language" after the Illinois Democrat who came up with it last year, the provision mandates that the scholarship program ends after the next school year unless Congress reauthorizes it and the District of Columbia approves. The beauty of this language is that it allows opponents to kill the program simply by doing nothing. Just the sort of sneaky maneuver that's so handy when you don't want inner-city moms and dads to catch on that you are cutting one of their lifelines.

Deborah Parker says such a move would be devastating for her kids. "I once took Sarah to Roosevelt High School to see its metal detectors and security guards," she says. "I wanted to scare her into appreciation for what she has at Sidwell." It's not just safety, either. According to the latest test scores, fewer than half of Roosevelt's students are proficient in reading or math.

That's the reality that the Parkers and 1,700 other low-income students face if Sen. Durbin and his allies get their way. And it points to perhaps the most odious of double standards in American life today: the way some of our loudest champions of public education vote to keep other people's children -- mostly inner-city blacks and Latinos -- trapped in schools where they'd never let their own kids set foot.

This double standard is largely unchallenged by either the teachers' unions or the press corps. For the teachers' unions, it's a fairly cold-blooded calculation. They're willing to look the other way at lawmakers who chose private or parochial schools for their own kids -- so long as these lawmakers vote in ways that keep the union grip on the public schools intact and an escape hatch like vouchers bolted.

As for the press, complaints tend to be limited to the odd column or editorial. That's one reason it was so startling back in 2000 when Time magazine's Tamala Edwards, during a live televised debate at Harlem's Apollo Theater, asked Al Gore about the propriety of sending his own son to private school while opposing any effort to extend the same choice to African-Americans without his financial wherewithal.

As CNN's Jeff Greenfield would note later in the same debate, Mr. Gore "bristled" when Ms. Edward's put the question to him.

Virginia Walden-Ford, executive director of D.C. Parents for School Choice, wouldn't mind making a few more politicians bristle. "I'd like to see a reporter stand up at one of those nationally televised press conferences and ask President Obama what he thinks about what his own party is doing to keep two innocent kids from attending the same school where he sends his?"

As for Sidwell, the school has welcomed the Opportunity Scholarship program. Though headmaster Bruce Stewart declines to get into either politics or the Obamas, he says that a program that gives parents more educational options for their children is not only good for their kids, it's good for the community. Plainly he's not doing it for the money: Even the full D.C. voucher covers only a small fraction of Sidwell's actual costs.

All of which leaves the First Parent with a decision to make: Will he stand up for those like his own children's schoolmates -- or stand in front of the Sidwell door with Mr. Durbin? It's hard to imagine white congressional Democrats going up against him if he called them out on an issue where they have put him in this embarrassing position. This, after all, is a man who has written of the "anger" he felt as a community organizer, when his attempts to improve things for Chicago school kids ran up against an "uncomfortable fact."

"The biggest source of resistance [to reform]," he said, "was rarely talked about . . . namely, the uncomfortable fact that every one of our churches was filled with teachers, principals, and district superintendents. Few of these educators sent their own children to public schools; they knew too much for that. But they would defend the status quo with the same skill and vigor as their white counterparts of two decades before."

Let's just say that Sarah and James Parker -- and thousands just like them -- could use some of that same Obama anger right about now.

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Chicago Tribune  
chicagotribune.com

## A vote for ignorance

March 3, 2009

"If there was any argument for vouchers, it was, 'Let's see if it works.' And if it does, whatever my preconception, you do what's best for kids."

*Barack Obama, Feb. 13, 2008*

There's a novel concept—approaching education policy with the paramount goal of helping students rather than, say, teachers unions or school bureaucracies. So novel, in fact, that within days of making that statement, Obama thought better of it. "Senator Obama has always been a critic of vouchers," his campaign declared.

Now Democrats in Congress are lining up to oppose this alternative rather than waiting to see if it works. In the giant spending bill passed last week by the House, they cut off money for the only federally financed voucher program in the U.S.

It's in Washington, D.C., which has among the worst schools in America. A 2007 report found that fewer than half of the capital's grade-school pupils are proficient in reading or math—and results are worse in higher grades.

In 2004, Congress financed a pilot program to give some 1,900 children vouchers to attend private schools.

It's a modest undertaking, providing just \$7,500 per child—less than a third of what the District of Columbia spends per pupil in public schools. It only begins to satisfy the demand for educational alternatives, since more than 7,000 kids applied for the vouchers. Ninety-nine percent of the recipients, by the way, are black or Hispanic, with an average family income of less than \$23,000.

But vouchers are anathema to many in the Democratic Party because teachers unions feel threatened by the prospect of more children going to non-union private schools. So this bill says there will be no more money for the program after this year and directs the head of D.C.'s public schools to "promptly take steps to minimize potential disruption and ensure smooth transition" for kids who will be forced back into schools their parents found wanting.

Democrats to kids: Tough luck.

What's the hurry here? This experiment has yet to run its course, with only two years' worth of data assessed so far. Patrick Wolf, a University of Arkansas professor who is leading the assessment, found that children who got vouchers have performed no better than those who were turned down. But he says there have been "large positive effects" on their parents' satisfaction.

And there are reasons for hope. Of the 10 studies of existing voucher systems, says Wolf, nine found significant academic improvements.

President Obama doesn't need to be told about the deficiencies of Washington's public schools: He rejected them in favor of a private school for his daughters.

Ask how many members of Congress send their children to public schools in D.C.

They are pushing through legislation that is grossly unfair fashion toward 1,900 children and their parents who don't have the luxury of paying for private schools.

We need more information about the effects of school vouchers. Should Democrats in Congress have their way, we won't get it.

If they want to end the experiment at such an early stage, it's not because they think it's failing, but because they fear it's working.

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# The Washington Post

## 'Potential' Disruption?

Ending D.C. school vouchers would dash the best hopes of hundreds of children.

Monday, March 2, 2009; A16

REP. DAVID R. Obey (Wis.) and other congressional Democrats should spare us their phony concern about the children participating in the District's school voucher program. If they cared for the future of these students, they wouldn't be so quick as to try to kill the program that affords low-income, minority children a chance at a better education. Their refusal to even give the program a fair hearing makes it critical that D.C. Mayor Adrian M. Fenty (D) seek help from voucher supporters in the Senate and, if need be, President Obama.

Last week, the Democrat-controlled House passed a spending bill that spells the end, after the 2009-10 school year, of the federally funded program that enables poor students to attend private schools with scholarships of up to \$7,500. A statement signed by Mr. Obey as Appropriations Committee chairman that accompanied the \$410 billion spending package directs D.C. Schools Chancellor Michelle A. Rhee to "promptly take steps to minimize potential disruption and ensure smooth transition" for students forced back into the public schools.

We would like Mr. Obey and his colleagues to talk about possible "disruption" with Deborah Parker, mother of two children who attend Sidwell Friends School because of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. "The mere thought of returning to public school frightens me," Ms. Parker told us as she related the opportunities -- such as a trip to China for her son -- made possible by the program. Tell her, as critics claim, that vouchers don't work, and she'll list her children's improved test scores, feeling of safety and improved motivation.

But the debate unfolding on Capitol Hill isn't about facts. It's about politics and the stranglehold the teachers unions have on the Democratic Party. Why else has so much time and effort gone into trying to kill off what, in the grand scheme of government spending, is a tiny program? Why wouldn't Congress want to get the results of a carefully calibrated scientific study before pulling the plug on a program that has proved to be enormously popular? Could the real fear be that school vouchers might actually be shown to be effective in leveling the academic playing field?

This week, the Senate takes up the omnibus spending bill, and we hope that, with the help of supporters such as Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman (I-Conn.), the program gets the reprieve it deserves. If it doesn't, someone needs to tell Ms. Parker why a bunch of elected officials who can send their children to any school they choose are taking that option from her.

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## The Washington Post

### Why Doesn't Ty'Sheoma Have a Choice?

By JEANNE ALLEN Washington  
Sunday, March 1, 2009; C07

What if Ty'Sheoma Bethea had a choice? Ty'Sheoma is the young lady who sat with first lady Michelle Obama when President Obama spoke to Congress Tuesday night. She had reached the president through a letter about her school, the ceiling that leaks, the walls that shake when trains go by, the poor education it provides. She warmed his heart and ours.

Ty'Sheoma's world is not unlike the District's before charter schools and scholarships, when enormous effort was made to improve schools, to no avail. It wasn't until these choices were available that people could see how financing a broken system, without accountability, does nothing. Now, charter schools and the scholarship program are not only educating nearly 35 percent of D.C. students but also ushering in a new wave of public school reform that would never have been on the table had the arrival of choice not shown the way and shed light on the failings of the system and its protectors.

What if Ty'Sheoma had a charter school? Poverty abounds in her home town of Dillon, S.C. Its school board and citizens have the power to start charter schools. But school boards fight their creation, claiming they undermine public schools. Charters use education money with one goal, to educate. If they don't succeed, they don't stay open.

Dillon's per-pupil expenditure -- \$8,700 -- is higher than the national average. That funds more than 50 staff positions at her J.V. Martin Junior High School (including four custodians). That's a student-to-staff ratio of 9 to 1, meaning there are more than twice as many adults serving students as at most schools in the country. What if Ty'Sheoma had an opportunity scholarship, which would send \$7,500 to the private school of her family's choosing? Those schools are not lush, but they are well-maintained, safe and successful in educating children. If Ty'Sheoma could vote with her feet, too, she'd find her allotted money spent where it should be, on ensuring student achievement. Her district might just make changes in response, lifting all schools.

But Ty'Sheoma doesn't have choices. She's the victim of a lawsuit filed by those who are adamant that money equals education. We know from years of equity battles that education doesn't change when courts order states to spend more. Facilities may get a facelift and teachers may make more, but not because they are better; it's because they are there. With choice, Ty'Sheoma's family could evaluate a school, review the programs and the data on school performance. Ty'Sheoma could choose to attend a school that worked for her.

Ty'Sheoma Bethea doesn't know that adults work in her schools regardless of how well they do their jobs, that there are no consequences for leaky roofs. She may not know that cities like this one offer choices that provide exactly what she wants and deserves. She's been told that she is treated inequitably because the state doesn't care about kids in Dillon. So she wrote the president, who brought her to Washington and told her story and asserted that the economic stimulus legislation helps her, absent any policy changes.

The Washington that has pledged to help her wants to abolish the D.C. program that affords choices to the poorest children. I wonder, if Ty'Sheoma had written the president about how choice benefited her, whether she would have been sitting with Michelle Obama.

If Ty'Sheoma had a choice, maybe we wouldn't know her at all.

*The writer is president of the Center for Education Reform.*

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# NEW YORK POST

## CONGRESS' SNEAKY SLAP AT DC'S KIDS

By ANDREW J. COULSON

February 26, 2009 --

SINCE 2004, a federally funded private-school voucher program has offered a lifeline to a few thousand inner-city kids in Washington, DC. Its initial five-year authorization is up for congressional renewal this week - and the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, chaired by Democrats David Obey and Daniel Inouye, respectively, are trying to ever-so-subtly unravel it.

The bill on the table fails to reauthorize the program for another five-year term, as would be usual. Instead, it only funds the program for another year. Worse, it would grant a new veto power over the program to the DC City Council - so that the program could be killed down the line by either Congress *or* the City Council.

It's clear that congressional Democrats want this program dead, but are hoping someone else will pull the plug so that they can't be blamed for kicking 1,900 kids out of independent and parochial schools they've come to depend on. Chairman Obey (D-Wis.) has reportedly urged DC Public Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee to prepare for the return of voucher students to DCPS.

Think of it as Myanmar on the Potomac: When Myanmar's ruling junta blocked desperately needed aid from reaching its cyclone-ravaged people last May, the world was outraged. How could a nation's leaders do that and still live with themselves? We might well ask our Democratic leaders in Washington the same question - for the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program provides a desperately needed escape from the city's disastrous public schools.

Just listen to the kids themselves. The Web site [VoicesOfSchoolChoice.org](http://VoicesOfSchoolChoice.org) offers a collection of videos in which voucher students and parents explain what they've gained from the program, and what they left behind in public schools. Be ready to feel a lump in your throat.

"My girls used to cry about using the restrooms [in public schools] 'cause they're so unclean," comments Ayesha McKinney, a single mom whose daughters have received Opportunity Scholarships. She adds: "There's no reason for kids to be in this unsafe, unclean environment."

Safety is a big issue with the voucher families - both for its own sake and for its impact on their children's education. Carlos Battle, a soft-spoken teen, notes: "If I was in the public school, I'd have to think more about protecting myself than about learning." He explains, "There wasn't a lot of actual learning going on in the public school. I wanted a challenge." If Congress doesn't reauthorize the program, he concludes, "that's basically taking a lot of the kids' dreams away."

Voucher parents are significantly happier with their schools than are public-school parents, but critics complain that the program had yet to raise overall academic achievement by a statistically significant margin - after just its second year of operation. Putting aside the fact that DC vouchers *have* significantly improved test scores for certain subgroups of students, this criticism ignores a crucial point: The voucher value is *less than a quarter* of total per-pupil spending in DC public schools.



The vouchers are worth an average of \$6,000; last year, the District was spending \$24,600 per student. If you could save 75 percent on a purchase, get the same or better quality of service, and know you'd be happier with the result, wouldn't you do it?

It seems congressional Democrats would not.

Of course, they have other things to think about besides what's best for kids - like getting re-elected. Public-school-employee unions see even tiny private-school-choice programs as a threat, and those unions are the backbone of the Democratic Party.

So, just as Myanmar's military dictators rebuffed international assistance because they saw it as a threat to their political power, Democrats in Washington appear willing to extinguish the dreams of a few thousand poor kids to protect their political base.

Democratic leaders no doubt hope that they can sweep all of this under the rug before the next election. But sooner or later, the public is going to stop believing the myth that more money for bureaucrats and fewer choices for parents are the solutions to America's educational woes.

When that time comes, a harsh scrutiny will be turned on all those who propped up the wretched school monopolies that are clipping so many children's wings. And whatever political harm Democrats might suffer from fully reauthorizing the DC voucher program now, it will pale compared the party's fate if it blindly rides the public-school status quo all the way to its inevitable collapse.

*Andrew J. Coulson directs the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom.*

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# The Washington Post

## Voucher Subterfuge

*Hoping no one notices, congressional Democrats step between 1,800 D.C. children and a good education.*

Wednesday, February 25, 2009; A18

CONGRESSIONAL Democrats want to mandate that the District's unique school voucher program be reauthorized before more federal money can be allocated for it. It is a seemingly innocuous requirement. In truth it is an ill-disguised bid to kill a program that gives some poor parents a choice regarding where their children go to school. Many of the Democrats have never liked vouchers, and it seems they won't let fairness or the interests of low-income, minority children stand in the way of their politics. But it also seems they're too ashamed -- and with good reason -- to admit to what they're doing.

At issue is a provision in the 2009 omnibus spending bill making its way through Congress. The \$410 billion package provides funds for the 2009-10 school year to the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, a pioneering effort that awards scholarships of up to \$7,500 a year for low-income students to attend private schools. But language inserted by Democrats into the bill stipulates that any future appropriations will require the reauthorization of the program by Congress and approval from the D.C. Council.

We have no problem with Congress taking a careful look at this initiative and weighing its benefits. After all, it was approved in 2004 as a pilot program, subject to study. In fact, this is the rare experimental program that has been carefully designed to produce comparative results. But the proposed Democratic provision would short-circuit this study. Results are not due until June, and an additional year of testing is planned. Operators of the program need to accept applications this fall for the 2010-11 school year, and reauthorizations are complicated, time-consuming affairs. Indeed, staff members on various House and Senate committees scoffed yesterday when we asked about the chances of getting such a program reauthorized in less than a year. Legislation seeking reauthorization has not even been introduced.

If the Democratic leadership is so worried about process, it might want to review a recent report from the Congressional Budget Office listing the hundreds of millions of dollars that have been appropriated to programs whose authorizations have expired. Many of these programs get far more than the \$14 million allocated to the Opportunity Scholarships. House Minority Leader John A. Boehner (R-Ohio) was right to call out the Democrats for this back-door attempt to kill the voucher program. The attention should embarrass congressional Democrats into doing the right thing. If not, city leaders, including D.C. Mayor Adrian M. Fenty (D), need to let President Obama know that some 1,800 poor children are likely to have their educations disrupted.

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**Testimony of  
The National Coalition for Public Education  
Submitted to  
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs,  
for the Hearing Record on  
“The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Preserving School Choice for All”**

**May 13, 2009**

The National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE) submits this testimony for the purposes of the hearing conducted by the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, entitled “The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Preserving School Choice for All.” The National Coalition for Public Education is comprised of more than 50 education, civic, civil rights, and religious organizations devoted to the support of public schools. Founded in 1978, NCPE opposes the funneling of public money to private and religious schools through such mechanisms as tuition tax credits and vouchers. A list of the members of NCPE is attached.

We strongly believe that the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program should not be reauthorized. The three federal Department of Education studies<sup>1</sup> and the 2007 General Accountability Office (GAO) study<sup>2</sup> prove that the program is not improving student achievement, access to student resources, student motivation, or student perceptions of safety. Rather than continuing to spend millions of dollars on a program that has proven ineffective and that is geared towards only helping a small fraction of D.C. students, we believe that the money should be redirected to programs that help improve public education for all students in the District.

We acknowledge that the Committee may be able to point to some students who have gone to exemplary schools and seen improvement from the program. But according to government studies, these students are, unfortunately, the exception rather than the rule. First, according to the GAO study, only 3% of the students in the program attended the elite D.C. schools that cost \$20,000 or more a year. The reason students can attend these schools is not so much the \$7,500 voucher as it is the additional \$12,500-plus they receive in scholarships from private programs or the private school itself. A more complete examination of the program, such as the GAO in 2007, which shows that some children in the program were being sent to schools without occupancy certificates and to schools where over half the teachers lack bachelor’s degrees. Surely this is not a program that is serving the students well. Second, the studies show that the voucher program is not causing significant gains in academic achievement, increasing educational resources, or improving the school environment to justify continuing the program.

**The History of the Program**

The D.C. voucher program was created as an experimental 5-year pilot program in 2004. The program passed against the wishes of D.C. citizens, the District’s only Congressional

<sup>1</sup> The 2007 Report can be found at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pdf/20074009.pdf>. The 2008 Report can be found at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pdf/20084024.pdf>. And, the 2009 Report can be found at [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20094050/pdf/20094050\\_1.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20094050/pdf/20094050_1.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> The GAO Report can be found at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d089.pdf>.

Representative, and the majority of elected officials in D.C. The Republican-led U.S. House of Representatives passed the program by just one vote (209-208), on an evening when numerous Representatives who oppose vouchers were attending a presidential primary debate in Baltimore and when the vote was held open for an unusually long 40-minute period. The vote was not a partisan vote, as 14 Republicans, along with 194 Democrats, opposed the bill.

The full Senate did not vote on the issue. Indeed, the voucher language was pulled from the D.C. Appropriations Bill because it was clear the measure would not pass with the language. The program only passed when it was later added to the conference report of a \$280 billion omnibus appropriations bill.

#### **The Value of Public Schools**

Open and non-discriminatory in their acceptance of all students, American public schools are a unifying factor among the diverse range of ethnic and religious communities in our society. Public schools are the only schools that must meet the needs of all students. They do not turn children or families away. They serve children with physical, emotional, and mental disabilities, those who are extremely gifted and those who are learning challenged, right along with children without special needs.

Vouchers undermine this vital function, however, by placing the most motivated students into private schools, leaving the students who are most difficult to educate behind in the public schools. The D.C. voucher program also diverts desperately needed resources away from the public school system to fund the education of the few voucher students. The government would better serve our children by using these funds to make the public schools stronger and safer.

Public schools are not failing. Rather, they are striving to respond to the swift, substantive changes in society and the calls for reform. We, as citizens, must create an environment of support so public schools can continue to change and improve. We must shift from bashing public schools to empowering continual public school improvement. Only then can we create the public will and motivation to accomplish for true reform.

#### **Students from "Schools in Need of Improvement"**

The purpose of the D.C. voucher program was to improve the learning environment and academic achievement of D.C. students who attend "schools in need of improvement" (SINI). Yet the GAO study shows that such students are underrepresented in the program. Furthermore, the Department of Education reports issued in 2007, 2008, and 2009 show that these students perform no better in math or reading than their counterparts in the D.C. school system. The evidence is clear that the program is not serving its main purpose and, thus, should not be reauthorized.

#### **Academic Achievement**

Another goal of the voucher program is to improve student academic achievement, but studies show the program has failed to reach that goal. Again, the Department of Education reports analyzing the D.C. voucher program issued in 2007, 2008, and 2009 all found that the voucher program is not significantly improving student achievement.

First, as already explained, the Department of Education studies of the D.C. program have found that students from SINI schools, which are the students targeted by the program, have shown no improvement in reading or math due to the voucher program.

Minor increases in reading achievement found by the 2009 study did not apply to the key students in the program. Students who had attended SINI schools before entering the program and students who were in the lower third of test score performance before entering the program did *not* improve in reading. These students, of course, are the very students who proponents of the program purport it would help. Yet, the studies show that they are not improving academically.

The two sub-groups of students who showed the most improvement in reading were students for which federal government intervention is the least justifiable: students who did not come from SINI schools and students who were in the top two-thirds of the test-score distribution when they entered the program.

Second, the studies have concluded that the D.C. program has had no impact on the math achievement of students overall or of any of the ten subgroups of students in the study.

Furthermore, the Department of Education reports also found that many of the children who left the D.C. voucher program did so because the voucher schools did not provide the academic support they needed: of the students who left the voucher program in the first year, 45% stated that it was because the “child did not get the academic support he/she needed at the private school.” The number shot to 54% in the second year and was at 39% in the third year.

Finally, the 2007 Report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) also found that many of the voucher schools examined by the GAO were not accredited, and there is no evidence they submitted documentation proving educational soundness.

#### **Academic Atmosphere**

Proponents of the voucher program argue that the voucher program permits students to attend schools that are safer, provide better resources, and create a better learning environment. All of the federally administered studies, however, prove this theory wrong.

Although all three Department of Education studies show that *parents* believe that students in the voucher program are safer at school than those who did not participate, *students* have reported that participating in the program has had no impact on their actual school experience with dangerous activities.

Participation in the voucher program has also had no impact on student motivation and engagement. The 2008 and 2009 Department of Education studies have found that participating in the program has no statistically significant impacts on a students’ aspirations for the future, frequency of doing homework, time spent reading for fun, engagement in extracurricular activities, or attendance or tardiness rates.

The voucher program also fails to offer participating students greater educational resources. In fact, the Department of Education studies shows that students participating in the program are actually *less* likely to have access to ESL programs, learning support and special needs programs, tutors, counselors, cafeterias, and nurse's offices than students not in the program. And, the 2009 study shows that students in the program have no increase in access to before-and-after-school programs.

Furthermore, the voucher program does not provide participating students with better teachers than are available at the public schools. To the contrary, the GAO Report found that, at some schools, less than half of the teachers had even obtained a bachelor's degree. And, the 2009 Department of Education study revealed that the students participating in the voucher program rated their teacher's attitude no better than students who did not participate in the program. In addition, this study found that the student-teacher ratio for those students participating in the program was no better than those who were not in the program.

Again, proponents' claims are not supported by the federal studies. Reauthorization cannot be justified.

#### **Lack of Oversight, Accountability, and Internal Controls**

The 2007 GAO Report found troubling facts about the operation of voucher program. First, the GAO found that the grant administrator had not ensured that the participating schools adhered to the rules of the program or D.C. laws. For example, the administrator permitted schools to participate—and allowed students to attend schools—even though they lacked a valid D.C. occupancy certificate, failed to submit required financial data, and failed to submit required annual reports on operational reports with basic information on curriculum, teachers' education, and school facilities. Indeed, some participating schools failed to submit information on accreditation or educational soundness, yet voucher students were directed to and attended those schools.

The grant administrator also paid tuition for students to schools that actually did not charge tuition and made disbursements to other schools without requiring them to submit the proper paperwork.

The GAO report also criticized the grant administrator for providing inaccurate, misleading, and incomplete information to parents about the participating schools. Indeed, the administrator incorrectly reported information on some schools that could have significantly affected parents' choice of schools, such as the percentage of teachers who had at least a bachelor's degree and tuition rates.

#### **Student Access to Vouchers**

This voucher program does not provide school "choice" to students. To the contrary, it provides private schools with the opportunity to obtain federal funding to enroll the students of their choice. Indeed, the participating private schools can maintain their admission standards even for voucher students. So only those who meet the schools requirements, including academic testing, will be admitted to the school. Religious schools can also reject students based on gender. Thus,

even students who qualify for a voucher may never be able to use that voucher if a private school does not accept them into its school.

Thus, it is no surprise that certain groups of students have less access to voucher schools than others. For example, students with special needs often cannot find a private school that can serve them: The Department of Education reports show that a significant number of students had to reject their vouchers because they were unable to find a participating school that offered services for their learning or physical disability or other special needs. Indeed, in the first year of the program, 21% of the students who rejected a voucher did so for this reason, 17% rejected it for this reason in the second year, and 16% rejected it for this reason in the third year.

High school students also have less access to voucher schools: For the school year 2005-2006, only about 70 openings were available at the high school level.

And, according to the GAO Report, students seeking non-religious schools also have a limited number from which to choose, since most participating private schools were Catholic or Protestant, and these schools offered the most openings. Indeed, in the third year of the program, 82% of students in the program attended a faith-based school.

Furthermore, the 2008 study revealed that 8% of the students who left their voucher school did so because religious activities at the private school made the student uncomfortable. And 2% of students didn't even accept a voucher because they did not want to attend a school that provided religious instruction.

#### **Discrimination**

Religious schools that participate in the program are allowed to discriminate in admission on the basis of gender and in hiring on the basis of religion. A central principle of our constitutional order, however, is that "the Constitution does not permit the State to aid discrimination." *Norwood v. Harrison*, 413 U.S. 455, 465-66 (1973).

In addition to raising constitutional concerns, federally subsidized religious discrimination raises significant public policy concerns. When funding any school, whether public or private, the government should not surrender the longstanding principle of equal treatment for all—all students should be treated the same regardless of sex and all teachers the same regardless of religion. Taxpayer money should not fund programs that harm the fundamental civil rights of students and teachers.

#### **Funding Religious Schools**

Many of the members of our coalition object to taxpayer funds going towards religious education. Though the religious groups in our coalition value religious education, and recognize that parochial schools can serve a valuable role for many children, they also recognize that because most parochial schools either cannot or do not wish to separate the religious components of the education they offer from the academic programs, these schools must be funded by voluntary contributions, not taxation. One of the most dearly held principles of religious liberty is that government should not compel any citizen to furnish funds in support of a religion with

which he or she *disagrees*, or even a religion with which he or she *does agree*. The D.C. voucher program, however, violates that central tenet: it uses taxpayer money to fund primarily religious education. Indeed, approximately 82% of the students participating in the program attend religious schools. Parents certainly may choose such an education for their children, but no taxpayer should be required to pay for another's religious education.

Religious organizations and schools that rely on voluntary participation and contributions are likely to flourish. Government funds, however, threaten to shift religious schools' monetary source from the followers of their religion to the government treasury. And, with that shift, they also risk losing their religious identity, teachings, and message. To remain healthy, a religious school should follow the dictates of its adherents rather than the dictates of a government uninterested in its religious mission. To do this, they must reject government funding.

#### **Conclusion**

NCPE is committed to supporting public school education for all students in the District of Columbia. The D.C. voucher program, however, undermines public schools and generally does not significantly improve the academic resources, environment, or academic achievement for students—whether participating or not participating in the program. In a year that we could see significant cuts in federal funding to public education, now is not the time to continue sending taxpayer dollars to private schools. If Congress wants to improve education in the District, it should focus on programs that have proven results and that improve education for all students—not a select few. Therefore, we strongly urge the Committee not to reauthorize the program.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important issue.



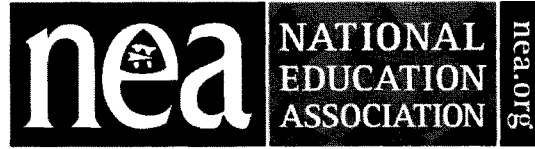
## National Coalition for Public Education

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The National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE) is comprised of more than 60 education, civic, civil rights, and religious organizations devoted to the support of public schools. Founded in 1978, NCPE opposes the funneling of public money to private and religious schools through such mechanisms as tuition tax credits and vouchers.

American Alliance for Health Physical Education, Recreation and Dance—AAHPERD  
 American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education—AACTE  
 American Association of School Administrators—AASA  
 American Association of University Women—AAUW  
 American Civil Liberties Union—ACLU  
 American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees—AFSCME  
 American Federation of Teachers—AFT  
 American Humanist Association—AHA  
 American Jewish Committee—AJC  
 American Jewish Congress—AJCongress  
 Americans for Democratic Action—ADA  
 Americans for Religious Liberty—ARL  
 Americans United for Separation of Church and State—AU  
 Anti-Defamation League—ADL  
 ASPIRA Association, Inc.  
 Association of Educational Service Agencies - AESA  
 Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development—ASCD  
 Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty—(BJC)  
 Center for Law and Education—CLE  
 Child Welfare League of America, Inc.—CWLA  
 Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder—CHADD  
 Council for Exceptional Children—CEC  
 Council for Secular Humanism  
 Council of Chief State School Officers—CCSSO  
 Council of the Great City Schools—CGCS  
 General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists  
 Hadassah  
 International Reading Association—IRA  
 The Interfaith Alliance—TIA  
 Jewish Council for Public Affairs—JCPA  
 Labor Council for Latin American Advancement—LCLAA  
 Leadership Conference on Civil Rights—LCCR  
 League of Women Voters—LWV  
 Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund—MALDEF  
 NA'AMAT USA  
 National Alliance of Black School Educators—NABSE  
 National Association for Bilingual Education—NABE  
 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People—NAACP

National Association of Elementary School Principals—NAESP  
 National Association of Partners in Education—NAPE  
 National Association of School Psychologists—NASP  
 National Association of Secondary School Principals—NASSP  
 National Association of State Boards of Education—NASBE  
 National Association of State Directors of Special Education—NASDSE  
 National Black Child Development Institute—NBCDI  
 National Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty—National PEARL  
 National Council of Jewish Women—NCJW  
 National Education Association—NEA  
 National Education Knowledge Industry Association—NEKIA  
 National Organization for Women—NOW  
 National Parent Teacher Association—National PTA  
 National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition - NREAC  
 National Rural Education Association—NREA  
 National School Boards Association—NSBA  
 National Urban League—NUL  
 New York City Board of Education—NYCBOE  
 Northwest Religious Liberty Association—NRLA  
 People For the American Way—PFAW  
 Presbyterian Church (USA), Washington Office—PCUSA  
 School Social Work Association of America—SSWAA  
 Secular Coalition for America  
 Service Employees International Union—SEIU  
 Union for Reform Judaism - URJ  
 Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations—UUAC  
 United Automobile Workers—UAW  
 United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries  
 United Methodist General Board of Church and Society—UMC-GBCS  
 Women of Reform Judaism—WRJ



*Great Public Schools for Every Student*

STATEMENT OF  
THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

SUBMITTED TO THE  
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and  
Government Affairs

For the Hearing Record on  
“The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program:  
Preserving School Choice for All”

MAY 2009

The National Education Association (NEA) respectfully submits these comments for the record in conjunction with the May 13, 2009 hearing conducted by the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, entitled "The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Preserving School Choice for All."

NEA opposes any extension of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program beyond what is currently provided for under current law. This voucher program, designed as a five-year pilot, has already been extended for one additional year specifically to allow participating students and schools to adjust to the program's termination and make the necessary transitions. The program has not been proven to increase student achievement. There is no reason to continue to divert scarce resources to a pilot program that has been proven ineffective.

Vouchers are not real education reform. Pulling 1,700 children out of a system that serves 65,000 doesn't solve problems – it ignores them. Real reform will put a qualified teacher in every classroom, keep their skills up to date with continuing education, and raise pay to attract and retain the best teachers. Rather than offering a chance for a few, we should be ensuring that every child has access to a great public school.

#### **The Pilot Program**

The Opportunity Scholarship Program was established as a five-year pilot under the Bush Administration. It was imposed on the residents of the District of Columbia over the objections of numerous pro-public education Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle and the residents of the District of Columbia. Congress has never imposed a federal voucher program on any other jurisdiction in the nation, but chose to implement this experiment in the District of Columbia, whose residents have no vote in Congress, despite opposition from a majority of the City Council.

In 1981, DC voters soundly rejected a referendum on a tuition tax credit (which is a different form of government school voucher) with 89 percent opposed and only 11 percent in favor. DC citizens again clearly expressed their opposition to vouchers in an opinion poll conducted in November 2002—prior to Congress' enactment of the DC voucher program. In that poll, 75 percent of District voters opposed private school vouchers.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, the District's only congressional representative, Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, along with DC Council members<sup>2</sup> and other congressional leaders, strongly opposed (and continue to oppose) the congressional effort to impose vouchers on the District of Columbia. The creation of the DC voucher program contradicts the principle of local control of education by imposing on citizens without a vote in Congress a program for which they and their elected representatives expressed opposition.

<sup>1</sup> Zogby International poll for NSBA, Nov. 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Marus, "Republicans Add DC Voucher Plan to Unamendable Appropriations Bill," *Assoc. Baptist Press*, Nov. 20, 2003, [http://www.abpnews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2667&Itemid=116](http://www.abpnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2667&Itemid=116) (stating that "the majority of elected officials in D.C. oppose the voucher proposal").

Even in Congress, the program passed with the narrowest margin possible—one vote (209-208).<sup>3</sup> The narrowness of the vote in the House is even more remarkable considering the vote was taken in a Republican-led Congress while numerous Representatives who opposed vouchers were attending a presidential primary debate in Baltimore, and was held open for an unusually long 40-minute period.<sup>4</sup> Among the “no” votes were 14 Republicans.<sup>5</sup> In the Senate, the voucher program was stripped from the DC Appropriations bill before it hit the Senate floor because it was clear the bill could not pass with the voucher language.<sup>6</sup> The voucher program became law, nonetheless, when it was later inserted into the conference report of a \$280 billion omnibus appropriations bill.<sup>7</sup> In short, the Senate never even voted on the measure because it could not pass on a floor vote.<sup>8</sup>

Last year, Congress extended the Program for one additional year. In granting this extension, Congress instructed the Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools to take steps to “minimize potential disruption and ensure smooth transition for any students seeking enrollment in the public school system as a result of any changes made to the private scholarship program affecting periods after school year 2009-2010.” Congress also provided that no additional funding beyond the 2009-2010 year would be provided, absent an authorization of the program and consent of the DC City Council. In addition, Congress stipulated that funding was not to be used for schools failing to meet basic health and safety laws or for schools in which teachers teaching core subjects do not have college degrees.

NEA supported the one-year extension and continues to support the language in current law prohibiting any additional funding absent a program reauthorization, which would involve a full and open investigation into the program’s effectiveness and a full accounting of the use of program funds.

#### **Program Ineffectiveness**

We oppose any further extension of funding for the DC voucher program or any reauthorization, particularly given the lack of any evidence that it has made a difference in student achievement.

The Department of Education issued reports analyzing the DC voucher program in 2007, 2008, and 2009. These reports found that the voucher program is not improving student achievement. These findings are consistent with studies of private school voucher programs in Milwaukee<sup>9</sup> and Cleveland,<sup>10</sup> which have all revealed that vouchers do not improve math or reading achievement.

The Department of Education studies of the DC program have found that students from “schools in need of improvement (SINI),” which are the students targeted by the program,

<sup>3</sup> Spencer S. Hsu & Justin Blum, “DC School Voucher Bill Passes in House by 1 Vote: Grant Plan for at Least 1,300 Students Goes to Senate,” *Wash. Post*, Sept. 10, 2003, [http://www.kleasonline.org/DC\\_Voucher\\_Bill\\_Passes.htm](http://www.kleasonline.org/DC_Voucher_Bill_Passes.htm).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2003/roll478.xml>.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Marus, *supra*, note 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> Witte, Wolf, et al., *MPCP Longitudinal Educational Growth Study Second Year Report* (Mar. 2009); Witte, *Achievement Effects of Milwaukee Voucher program* (Feb. 1997); Witte, Stern, & Thorn, *Fifth Year Report Milwaukee Parental Choice Program* (Dec. 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Plucker, Muller, et al., *Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, Summary Report 1998-2004* (Feb. 2006); *Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, Executive Report 1998-2002* (Dec. 2003).

have shown no improvement in reading or math due to the voucher program.<sup>11</sup> The study also concluded that the DC program has had no impact on the math achievement of students overall or of any of the ten subgroups of students in the study.<sup>12</sup> In addition, minor increases in reading achievement found by the 2009 study were minimal and did not apply to the key students in the program.<sup>13</sup> Students who had attended SINI schools before entering the program and students who were in the lower third of test score performance before entering the program did not improve in reading.<sup>14</sup> The two sub-groups of students who showed the most improvement in reading were students for which federal government intervention is the least justifiable: students who did not come from SINI schools and students who were in the top two-thirds of the test-score distribution when they entered the program.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, the Department of Education reports also found that many of the children who left the DC voucher program did so because the voucher schools did not provide the academic support they needed: Of the students who left the voucher program in the first year, 45 percent stated that it was because the “child did not get the academic support he/she needed at the private school.”<sup>16</sup> The number shot to 54 percent in the second year and was at 39 percent in the third year.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the 2007 Report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) also debunks the myth that voucher schools improve academic achievement. That report found that many of the voucher schools were not accredited, and there is no evidence they submitted evidence of educational soundness.<sup>18</sup>

#### **Accountability and Teacher Quality**

The DC voucher program costs taxpayers approximately \$14 million of federal money annually, yet the schools are exempt from student testing, teacher qualification, and non-discrimination requirements, as well as open records and meetings laws that apply to public schools.

The teachers in many of the voucher schools lack the qualifications that public school teachers have. For example, the GAO Report found that “at least 3 of 52 schools that participated [in 2004-05] indicated that at least half of their teachers did not have at least a bachelor’s degree, and 6 schools indicated that about 10 to 20 percent of their teachers lacked at least a bachelor’s degree.”<sup>19</sup>

The 2007 GAO Report demonstrates that the voucher program is not accountable to the parents of participating students. The report concluded that although the Washington Scholarship Foundation (WSF), which administers the program, compiled an annual directory to help parents during the selection process, “it did not collect or omitted or incorrectly

<sup>11</sup> 2009 US Dep’t of Educ. Report at 35; 2008 US Dep’t of Educ. Report at 34-38; and US Dep’t of Educ., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After One Year* 44, 46, & xx (June 2007) (2007 US Dep’t of Educ. Report).

<sup>12</sup> 2009 US Dep’t of Educ. Report at xxvi, xxx; 2008 US Dep’t of Educ. Report at 34-38; and 2007 US Dep’t of Educ. Report at 44, 46, xviii, and xx.

<sup>13</sup> 2009 US Dep’t of Educ. at xxv-xxvi.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* at xxix.

<sup>16</sup> 2009 US Dep’t of Educ. Report at 25.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> GAO Report at 34.

<sup>19</sup> GAO Report at 34.

reported some information that would have helped parents evaluate the quality of participating schools.”<sup>20</sup> And, “[s]ome information WSF did provide to parents may have been misleading.”<sup>21</sup> In fact, “WSF incorrectly reported information on some schools that could have significantly affected parents’ choice of schools, primarily the percentage of teachers who had at least a bachelor’s degree and tuition rates.”<sup>22</sup>

#### **Access**

Not all public school students can gain access to a voucher school, as voucher schools are permitted to maintain their admissions standards and, thus, can essentially reject any public school student they choose. Voucher schools can reject students based on prior academic achievement. Voucher schools can also reject students on the basis of gender, and religious schools can discriminate against teachers based on their religion.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, public schools serve all students in DC.

Certain groups of DC students have less access to voucher schools than others. For example, students with special needs often cannot find a private school that can serve them: The Department of Education Reports show that a significant number of students had to reject their voucher because they were “unable to find a participating school that offered services for their child’s learning or physical disability or other special needs.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, in the first year of the program, 21 percent of the students who rejected a voucher did so for this reason,<sup>25</sup> 17 percent rejected it for this reason in the second year, and 16 percent rejected it for this reason in 2009.<sup>26</sup>

High school students also have less access to voucher schools: “For the school year 2005-2006, only about 70 openings were available at the high school level.”<sup>27</sup> And, students seeking non-religious schools also “have a limited number to choose from, since most participating private schools were Catholic or Protestant, and these schools offered the most openings.

#### **Lack of Student Data**

We are very concerned that Congress would consider extending funding for students currently in the program despite a startling lack of data about the students. Congress should, at a minimum, be provided detailed information on the grade level and school of each participating student, where the student lives and what public school the student would otherwise attend, and whether the student was already enrolled in the private or religious school prior to the receiving the voucher. We believe that the WSF should be required to provide such information

<sup>20</sup> *GAO Report* at 36.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> P.L. 108-199 Stat. 3 (2004).

<sup>24</sup> 2008 *US Dep’t of Educ. Report* at 22.

<sup>25</sup> 2009 *US Dep’t of Educ. Report* at 23.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> *GAO Report* at 30-31

WSF should also be required to provide information about all the schools participating in the program, including whether they meet health and safety standards, and the qualifications of the teachers.

#### **Transitioning Current Students out of the Program**

Proponents of continuing funding for the program cite the potential disruption for students currently participating. However, as stated above, Congress has already extended the program for one additional year for the express purpose of allowing time for necessary transitions.

In addition, ending this program in no way eliminates the ability of the WSF to continue funding scholarships with private donations. The WSF has existed since 1993.<sup>28</sup> Before it was selected to administer the DC program, it relied entirely on private donations to provide private school scholarships to DC students and, at the time it was chosen, was giving away more than one-thousand scholarships each year.<sup>29</sup> The WSF continues to raise large sums of money and provides scholarships with that money.<sup>30</sup> And, with help from private school supporters, the WSF is sure to raise even more money in the future.

Furthermore, the WSF is not the only entity that offers scholarships for private school tuition. There are various scholarship organizations that serve DC students who seek a private school education,<sup>31</sup> and individual DC private schools also offer scholarships.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, some of the students receiving voucher money already attended a private school before getting voucher money, making it unlikely they would have to return to the public schools.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the fact that the program has been known since its inception as a limited, five-year pilot program, the WSF did not take steps to help parents and students transition. To the contrary, the WSF recently sent out letters admitting new students into the program<sup>34</sup>, even though the program has not been reauthorized and the explanatory language accompanying the FY2009 Omnibus Appropriations Bill<sup>35</sup> stated that no new students should be admitted into the program for the 2009-2010 school year.

<sup>28</sup> US Dep't of Educ., "Press Release: Administrator for DC School Choice Incentive Program Selected, March 24, 2004, <http://www.dcpwatch.com/vouchers/040324.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> Washington Scholarship Fund, "WSF Programs and Services," <http://www.washingtonscholarshipfund.org/programs/index.html>.

<sup>31</sup> These include Capital Partners for Education (<http://www.cpe.org>), the Latino Student Fund (<http://www.latinostudentfund.org>), and the Black Student Fund (<http://www.blackstudentfund.org>).

<sup>32</sup> Individual private schools often have their own scholarship funds, such as the one at Sidwell Friends (<http://www.sidwell.edu/admissions/financialaid.asp>).

<sup>33</sup> US Gov't Accountability Office, *District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Additional Policies and Procedures Would Improve Internal Controls and Program Operations*, Pub. No. 08-9 at 5.41 (Nov. 2007) (GAO Report); see also Letter from Senator Feinstein to the Washington Scholarship Fund, Feb. 11, 2005, <http://feinstein.senate.gov/05releases/r-dcvoucher021105.htm> (stating that 187 vouchers in the first year of the program were offered to students already in private schools).

<sup>34</sup> Presumed Dead: Politics is driving the destruction of the District's school voucher program," *Wash. Post*, April 11, 2009, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/10/AR2009041003073\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/10/AR2009041003073_pf.html).

<sup>35</sup> The accompanying language states: "Funding provided for the private scholarship program shall be used for currently-enrolled participants rather than new applicants."



**Experimentation in the District of Columbia**

The DC voucher program was imposed on the residents of the District of Columbia in an unprecedented move that would likely never have been attempted with any other part of the country. Congress overrode the will of DC residents, their elected City Council, and their elected representative in Congress, a feat possible only because the District of Columbia has no voting representation in Congress. Without two Senators and a voting member in the House, DC residents had no power to stop Congress from using their city for this experimentation. The imposition of the voucher program over the objections of DC taxpayers serves to highlight the need to afford DC residents voting representation in Congress – something NEA has long supported.

**Real Reform**

The real question Congress should be asking is what is the best use of federal funds to ensure ALL children the highest quality education, including the 65,000 children in DC public schools.

If Congress is truly interested in improving the education of children attending schools that have been identified as needing improvement, they should use the tools that have been provided under No Child Left Behind, which requires disaggregation of data to reveal which groups of students need assistance and in which academic areas. This facilitates targeting assistance to those specific needs. Which programs to implement should be determined locally, but the U.S. Department of Education has created a clearinghouse of research to help school districts, educators, parents, and other stakeholders choose programs that have been proven effective.

The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) has established a comprehensive, systematic process to review studies of education interventions. Through a literature review, initial screening process, and application of evidence standards, a review team dedicated to each topic area assesses the quality of research. A brief review of their database revealed dozens of programs that have been evaluated according to research methodologies that meet this high standard of review, and have been scientifically proven effective at improving student achievement in reading [see appendix A] and math [see Appendix B], at increasing the likelihood of students staying in school and completing their education, [see Appendix C], and at improving the language and achievement of English language learners [See Appendix D].

**Conclusion**

The evidence is clear and overwhelming: if our intent is to help children succeed, the answer is not a one-size-fits-all magic elixir that has thus far proven only that it does not improve the academic achievement of students attending schools in need of improvement. The answer is to identify and fund proven school improvement strategies, such as those identified by the Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse.

We urge Congress to reject efforts to appropriate any additional funding for the DC voucher program and, instead, focus resources on proven strategies to help ALL children excel.

### Appendix A

Selected programs that have been proven effective at improving reading skills.

***Stepping Stones to Literacy (SSL)*** is a supplemental curriculum designed to promote listening, print conventions, phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and serial processing/rapid naming (quickly naming familiar visual symbols and stimuli such as letters or colors). The program targets kindergarten and older preschool students considered to be underachieving readers, based on teacher's recommendations, assessments, and systematic screening. Students participate in 10- to 20-minute daily lessons in a small group or individually. The curriculum consists of 25 lessons, for a total of 9–15 hours of instructional time. Two studies met the WWC standards. They included 120 kindergarten students in 17 elementary schools in the Midwest.

*Stepping Stones to Literacy* was found to have positive effects (average 30 percentile points) on student outcomes in the alphabetics domain.

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/beginning%5Freading/ssl>

***Kaplan SpellRead*** is a literacy program for struggling readers in grades 2 or above, including special education students, English language learners, and students more than two years below grade level in reading. *Kaplan SpellRead* integrates the auditory and visual aspects of the reading process and emphasizes specific skill mastery through systematic and explicit instruction. The program takes five to nine months to complete and consists of 140 lessons divided into three phases. Two studies of *Kaplan SpellRead* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. The two studies included 208 students from first to third grades in Pennsylvania and in Newfoundland, Canada.

*Kaplan SpellRead* was found to have positive effects on alphabetics (average 18 percentile points) and potentially positive effects on fluency (average 9 percentile points) and comprehension (average 20 percentile points). <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/beginning%5Freading/spellread>

***Reading Recovery***<sup>®</sup> is a short-term tutoring intervention intended to serve the lowest-achieving (bottom 20%) first-grade students. The goals of *Reading Recovery*<sup>®</sup> are to promote literacy skills, reduce the number of first-grade students who are struggling to read, and prevent long-term reading difficulties. *Reading Recovery*<sup>®</sup> supplements classroom teaching with one-to-one tutoring sessions, generally conducted as pull-out sessions during the school day. Tutoring, which is conducted by trained *Reading Recovery*<sup>®</sup> teachers, takes place daily for 30 minutes over 12–20 weeks.

Four studies of *Reading Recovery*<sup>®</sup> meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards, and one study meets WWC evidence standards with reservations. The five studies included approximately 700 first-grade students in more than 46 schools across the United States.

*Reading Recovery*<sup>®</sup> was found to have positive effects on alphabetics (average 34 percentile points) and general reading achievement (average 32 percentile points) and potentially positive effects on fluency (average 46 percentile points) and comprehension (average 14 percentile points).

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/beginning%5Freading/reading%5F recovery>

## Appendix B

Selected programs that have been proven effective at improving math skills.

*The I CAN Learn® Education System* is an interactive, self-paced, mastery-based software system. Studies included in this WWC review assess the effectiveness of the *Pre-Algebra* and *Algebra* components of the *I CAN Learn® Education System*. One study of *I CAN Learn® Pre-Algebra* and *Algebra* meets What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards and four studies meet WWC evidence standards with reservations. The five studies included 16,519 eighth-grade students from middle schools in California, Florida, Georgia, and Louisiana.

*I CAN Learn® Pre-Algebra* and *Algebra* was found to have positive effects on math achievement (average 5 percentile points). <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/middle%5Fmath/iclprea>

*Saxon Math* curricula and materials are available for grades K through 12, with the content and skills designed to meet National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) standards and various state standards. This WWC report focuses on middle school math curricula. One study of *Saxon Middle School Math* met What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards, and five studies met standards with reservations. The six studies included over 5,300 students in sixth to ninth grades from over 70 schools in Georgia, Missouri, Mississippi, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas.

*Saxon Middle School Math* was found to have positive effects on math achievement (average 8 percentile points). <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/middle%5Fmath/smsm>

*The Expert Mathematician* is designed to help middle school students develop the thinking processes for mathematical applications and communication. *The Expert Mathematician* uses a software and consumable print materials package. Each lesson ranges from 40–120 minutes, or one to three class periods, and combine integrated computer software with workbook activities. One study on *The Expert Mathematician* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. The one study included 90 eighth-grade students in a middle school in St. Louis, Missouri.<sup>1</sup>

*The Expert Mathematician* was found to have a potentially positive effect on math achievement (average 14 percentile points). <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/middle%5Fmath/expert%5Fmath>

*Everyday Mathematics* is a core curriculum for students in kindergarten through grade 6 covering numeration and order, operations, functions and sequences, data and chance, algebra, geometry and spatial sense, measures and measurement, reference frames, and patterns. The distinguishing features of *Everyday Mathematics* are its focus on real-life problem solving, student communication of mathematical thinking, and appropriate use of technology. This curriculum also emphasizes balancing different types of instruction, using various methods for skills practice, and fostering parent involvement in student learning. Four studies of *Everyday Mathematics* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards with reservations. These studies included a total of approximately 12,600 students in grades 3–5 from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and attending schools in urban, suburban, and rural communities in multiple states.<sup>1</sup>

*Everyday Mathematics* was found to have potentially positive effects on students' math achievement (average 6 percentile points).

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/elementary%5Fmath/eday%5Fmath>

### Appendix C

Selected programs that have been proven effective at improving graduation rates

**Accelerated middle schools** are self-contained academic programs designed to help middle school students who are behind grade level catch up with their age peers. If these students begin high school with other students their age, the hope is that they will be more likely to stay in school and graduate. The programs serve students who are one to two years behind grade level and give them the opportunity to cover an additional year of curriculum during their one to two years in the program. Accelerated middle schools can be structured as separate schools or as schools within a traditional middle school.

One study of accelerated middle schools met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards, and two studies met them with reservations. The three randomized controlled trials included more than 800 students in school districts in Georgia, Michigan, and New Jersey.

Accelerated middle schools were found to have potentially positive effects on staying in school (average 18 percentile points) and positive effects on progressing in school (average 35 percentile points). <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/dropout/ams>

**ALAS**, an acronym for “Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success” that means “wings” in Spanish, is a middle school intervention designed to address student, school, family, and community factors that affect dropping out. Each student is assigned a counselor who monitors attendance, behavior, and academic achievement; provides feedback; and coordinates students, families, and teachers. Counselors also serve as advocates for students and intervene when problems are identified. Students are trained in problem-solving skills, and parents are trained in parent-child problem solving, how to participate in school activities, and how to contact teachers and school administrators to address issues. One study of *ALAS*, involving 94 high-risk Latino students entering seventh grade in one urban junior high school in California, met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards.

*ALAS* was found to have potentially positive effects on staying in school (average 42 percentile points) and potentially positive effects on progressing in school at the end of the intervention (ninth grade)(average 19 percentile points). <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/dropout/alas>

**Talent Search** aims to help low-income and first-generation college students (those whose parents do not have four-year college degrees) complete high school and gain access to college through a combination of services designed to improve academic achievement and increase access to financial aid. Services include test taking and study skills assistance, academic advising, tutoring, career development, college campus visits, and financial aid application assistance.

Two studies of *Talent Search* met What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards with reservations—one conducted in Texas and another in Florida. Together, the studies included about 5,000 students.

*Talent Search* was found to have potentially positive effects on completing school (average 17 percentile points). <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/dropout/talent%5Fsearch>

### Appendix D

Selected programs that have been proven effective at improving achievement and English language development for English Language Learners

**Peer Tutoring and Response Groups** aims to improve the language and achievement of English language learners by pairing or grouping students to work on a task. Three studies of *Peer Tutoring and Response Groups* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. These studies included 118 English language learners from first to sixth grades in Florida, Texas, and Washington state. *Peer Tutoring and Response Groups* was found to have positive effects on English language development (average 17 percentile points). <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/english%5Fflang/ptrg>

The **Vocabulary Improvement Program for English Language Learners and Their Classmates (VIP)** is a 15-week vocabulary development program for English language learners and native English speakers (grades 4–6). It includes 30–45 minute whole class and small group activities. One study of *VIP* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards with reservations. It included 142 English language learner students in the fifth grade in 16 classrooms in California, Virginia, and Massachusetts. *VIP* was found to have potentially positive effects on reading achievement (average 19 percentile points) and English language development (17 percentile points). <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/english%5Fflang/vip>

**Reading Mastery** is a direct instruction program designed to provide explicit, systematic instruction in English language reading in elementary school grades. Although not designed exclusively for English language learners, *Reading Mastery* can be used with this group of students. One study of *Reading Mastery* met the WWC evidence standards. This study included both English language learners and English speaking students in grades K–4 in Oregon. The investigators used the *Reading Mastery* program as a supplement to normal reading instruction for Spanish speaking students who were markedly behind expected reading achievement.

*Reading Mastery* was found to have potentially positive effects on the reading achievement of English language learners (average 28 percentile points). <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/english%5Fflang/read%5Fmaster>

**Instructional Conversations** and **Literature Logs** are used in combination. *Instructional Conversations* are small-group discussions. Acting as facilitators, teachers engage English language learners in discussions about stories, key concepts, and related personal experiences, which allow them to appreciate and build on each others' experiences, knowledge, and understanding. *Literature Logs* require English language learners to write in a log in response to writing prompts or questions related to sections of stories. These responses are then shared in small groups or with a partner. Two studies of *Instructional Conversations and Literature Logs* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards with reservations. The two studies included over 200 Hispanic English language learners from grades 2–5.

*Instructional Conversations and Literature Logs* was found to have potentially positive effects on reading achievement (average 29 percentile points) and English language development (average 23 percentile points). <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/english%5Fflang/icll>

**RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS OPPOSE FURTHER REAUTHORIZATION OF  
WASHINGTON, DC VOUCHER PROGRAM**

May 12, 2009

Senator Joseph I. Lieberman  
Chairman  
Committee on Homeland Security  
& Governmental Affairs  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Susan Collins  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Homeland Security  
& Governmental Affairs  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Lieberman and Ranking Member Collins:

On behalf of the diverse group of religious organizations we represent, we write to oppose the reauthorization of the Washington, DC voucher program. The program is unnecessary and ineffective.

We oppose efforts to fund private religious education with public dollars, including through vouchers. While we recognize parochial schools serve a valuable function, and affirm their treasured status among some of our constituency, religious teaching should be funded by voluntary contributions, not through compulsory taxation. Government proposals that divert public dollars to private religious interests violate this principle and threaten religious liberty.

Vouchers violate the religious liberty rights of all taxpayers – rights that are protected by the “no establishment” principles of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Specifically, they threaten to promote religion and entangle the government in religious affairs. Most parochial schools either cannot or do not wish to separate the religious components of the education they offer from the academic programs. Indeed, that is why most of the schools were created and continue to exist. Parents certainly may choose such an education for their children, but should not ask Congress, which must remain neutral in matters of religion, to fund private, religious interests.

Vouchers may also bring unintended consequences for religious schools accepting the government money. It is an iron law of politics that what the government funds, the government regulates. This makes sense because without regulation, there can be no accountability. Vouchers open the door to excessive government entanglement with religion through burdensome government regulation and oversight. If religious schools are to maintain their distinctly religious character, they should not accept government vouchers and the commensurate government entanglement with their affairs.

Although the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a voucher program under specific criteria in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, 536 U.S. 639 (2002), its ruling does not make school vouchers constitutional in every instance. Even after *Zelman* there remain constitutional questions that must be addressed in any voucher program, but such questions notwithstanding, there are profound policy concerns with the DC program. Several studies of the program have demonstrated its ineffectiveness. For example, a 2007 GAO report found that a mere 4% of the students receiving funds actually

attended schools "in need of improvement" and that many voucher schools lacked accreditation and commonly accepted academic standards. Most disturbingly, in some cases government funds were disbursed to schools that did not even charge tuition to non-voucher program students. Similarly, studies of this and other voucher programs have shown that such programs fall short of the goals of improving student education and improving public schools by fostering competition.

Expanding educational opportunities for disadvantaged District of Columbia children is a laudable goal. We call on Congress to find solutions that do so without maintaining this unnecessary, ineffective, and unconstitutional voucher program. Accordingly, we urge you to vote against the reauthorization of the DC voucher program and terminate this unconscionable threat to religious liberty.

Sincerely,

African American Ministers in Action  
 American Jewish Committee  
 American Jewish Congress  
 Anti-Defamation League  
 Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty  
 Friends Committee on National Legislation  
 National Council of Jewish Women  
 Northwest Religious Liberty Association  
 Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism  
 United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries  
 United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

cc: Members of the United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Government Affairs

**Written Testimony of**

**Ronald B. Millar**

**Acting Director, Secular Coalition for America**

**Submitted to the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**

**Hearing on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Preserving School Choice for All**

**May 13, 2009**

I want to thank Chairman Lieberman, Ranking Member Collins and members of the Committee for this opportunity to submit written testimony as you consider whether or not to reauthorize the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program.

The Secular Coalition for America is the leading organization promoting the viewpoints of nontheistic Americans and their federal policy concerns. Headquartered in Washington D.C., and founded in 2005, our mission is to increase the visibility of and respect for nontheists in the United States, and to protect and strengthen the secular character of our government as the best guarantee of freedom for all Americans. We are members of the National Coalition for Public Education, which is a coalition of civil rights, civil liberties, labor and education groups which fights against voucher programs. While the Secular Coalition for America opposes voucher programs and other revenue shifting measures which pay for religious education, we take no position on the use of vouchers for secular private education.

**The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program Involves an Inappropriate Use of Government Funds to Support Religion**

One of the most dearly held principles of religious liberty is that government should not compel any citizen to furnish funds in support of a religion with which he or she disagrees, or even a religion with which he or she does agree.<sup>1</sup>

According to a U.S. Department of Education report published in March, 2009, 82% of students whose tuition is paid for by the District of Columbia voucher program attend faith-based

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, 1789



schools.<sup>2</sup> Only 22% of students in the D.C. program attend a school that charges non-voucher students more than the \$7,500 D.C. pays for a voucher student to attend the school.<sup>3</sup> Thus, for most students a voucher covers the cost of all instruction provided by the school, non-religious and religious instruction alike.

For some schools it is even difficult to identify what part of the curriculum could be characterized as “non-religious”. As an example, one school that receives taxpayer funds pursuant to the District of Columbia voucher program, the Ambassador Baptist Church Christian School, states on its web-site that the school’s “primary mission and goal ... is to train the students in the knowledge of God and the Christian way of life and to provide them with an excellent educational experience.... God’s truth is infused throughout the curriculum and is reinforced in chapel each week.” Other schools that receive taxpayer funds include the New Macedonia Christian Academy which boasts about delivering “a high quality Christian education to our students while instilling a strong Christ-centered academic foundation” and the Dupont Park School, which encourages “each student to develop a personal relationship with God.” For such schools worship and religious doctrine are so intertwined with academic life as to be indistinguishable. There is no separation of non-religious and religious education.<sup>4</sup>

**The D.C. Voucher Program Should Not Be Reauthorized**

The Secular Coalition opposes the use of government funds for religious purposes, including vouchers for religious schools. We agree with the founders of the United States that no individual taxpayer should be required to pay for the propagation of another's religion. This

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Dep’t of Education, Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years (March 2009) xxi.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Dep’t of Education, Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years (March 2009) ix.

<sup>4</sup> Students are directly affected by this lack of separation of non-religious and religious education and the absence of an opt-out provision to allow students to forgo religious instruction, worship and indoctrination. More than eight percent of the children who leave their voucher schools do so because “religious activities at the private school make the child uncomfortable,” according to the 2008 U.S. Department of Education Report. U.S. Dep’t of Education, Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Two Years (June 2008) 23.

fundamental protection should certainly preclude taxpayer subsidization of religious organizations by supporting the religious education – and indoctrination – of a fellow citizen's child. Safeguarding every American's freedom of conscience is the very purpose of the Establishment Clause contained in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

When religious schools are privately funded, they have an undisputed right to include religious content in their curriculum. However, once taxpayer dollars enter the equation, it is imperative for the government to avoid funding religious activity.

The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program should not be reauthorized.

**Post-Hearing Questions for the Record  
Submitted to LaTasha Bennett  
From Senator Susan M. Collins**

**“The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Preserving School Choice for All”  
May 13, 2009**

1. Under President Obama’s budget proposal, only the students currently enrolled in the program will be allowed to continue to participate. How will this affect your family?

**Response:**

I am devastated by President Obama’s budget proposal that only funds the education for one of my children. I have no idea how to tell my daughter Nia that the President we supported is not fighting for her to have the same educational opportunities as her older brother. This program has been a blessing for my son and me – and I will fight to make sure my daughter and other children in DC can participate.

I know that the program is a success because my son, Nico, has thrived since receiving a DC Opportunity Scholarship. He attends Naylor Road Private School where he excels. The school provides a safe and secure learning environment that puts a strong focus on academics. He wants to be a doctor and I know that he can be thanks to this educational opportunity.

The DC public school assigned to my neighborhood is a “school in need of improvement”. The percentage of the students proficient was 28.57% in reading and 17.46% in math in 2008. This is unacceptable. Nico is much farther ahead academically than the children I know who attend this school. Getting a good education for my child is the #1 priority in my life.

My daughter, Nia, was eligible and accepted for a DC Opportunity Scholarship for the upcoming school year but then the scholarship was taken away. I am so upset someone would take away the opportunity for her to go to a great school. She is 4 years old and attended Naylor Road’s Pre-K program paid for by a DHS voucher from the District of Columbia. I am astounded by her progress in Pre-K that has prepared her to excel in Kindergarten. She has so much potential and it would devastate her to leave the school that she loves.

Now I constantly worry about where Nia will attend school. I am afraid the schools that would enable her to learn and succeed are options beyond my reach without the DC Opportunity Scholarship. Also, they took back Nia’s scholarship after the out of boundary process for DC public schools and after the majority of the public charter schools had finished their admissions. I have emailed with Chancellor Rhee’s office about potential alternatives – but they are so limited at this point. They suggested four schools: two of which have no spaces in Kindergarten and the other two are about an hour commute each way from my home because I don’t have a car. My heart is heavy as I know that there are no alternatives that are nearly as good as the school she could attend. If only politics wasn’t getting in the way.

President Obama’s budget proposal is not a compromise – it will separate my children and devastate my family. With his proposal, my child’s future won’t be entirely in my hands. Politicians will have decided that they should restrict my daughter’s options and not trust me to pick the best school for her. As a parent I want the best for my children, just like our President, Senators, and City Leaders. I have seen firsthand the quality education that Nico has received and it is hard for me to think that Nia won’t have the same opportunity. I am hopeful that after hearing my story and that of other parents, President Obama and other politicians will change their mind and allow the successful D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program to continue.

**Post-Hearing Questions for the Record  
Submitted to Ronald Holassie  
From Senator Susan M. Collins**

**“The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Preserving School Choice for All”  
May 13, 2009**

1. In your position as Deputy Youth Mayor for Legislative Affairs for the District of Columbia, have you had an opportunity to discuss your experience in the Opportunity Scholarship Program with Mayor Fenty? If you have, what did say to the Mayor regarding your experience in the program? If not, what would you say to him if you were given the opportunity?

Response:

While I have not had the opportunity to sit down with Mayor Fenty, I have spoken with him briefly several times. Mayor Fenty pledged his support for the DC Opportunity Scholarship—and I urged him to publicly talk about his support. I campaigned to be Deputy Youth Mayor for Legislative Affairs so that I could work with the Mayor and City Council on issues that are most important to youth. The children of DC need quality school options and we are counting on him to help us fight.

In November of 2007, I met Mayor Fenty at the Hillbrook Civic Association Meeting. My family and I expressed our support for the DC Opportunity Scholarship program, and asked Mayor Fenty if he would support the DC OSP. Mayor Fenty said he would. One year later, I went with my family to the Capitol View Civic Association where we spoke with the Mayor again. We needed his support more than ever. I told the Mayor that we are behind him and thanked him for his support of the Opportunity Scholarship Program. I then showed him a petition calling for the reauthorization of the program and let him know that we were collecting signatures. He read it and said it is “really good”. In May, after our Rally in Freedom Plaza for the DC OSP with approximately 2,000 people, I walked the petition to his office. We had collected over 7,400 signatures of DC residents.

Going into my sixth year as an Opportunity Scholarship recipient and a rising junior at Archbishop Carroll High School, I believe I have gained even more insight into the program. I can testify to the amazing opportunities it provides. While I have briefly spoken with Mayor Fenty a few times, I would welcome a chance to sit down with him and share my thoughts and experiences. I would make certain that Mayor Fenty understood precisely how the program worked, from a student’s perspective. I want to make sure that Mayor Fenty, other city leaders, and every Senator and Representative have an understanding of the DC Opportunity Scholarship program. It is supposed to be about the kids. This shouldn’t be politicized.

It was my understanding that if the program was shown to work, the program would be reauthorized. This was a program that our city leaders, including former Mayor Williams, fought for. It improves choices for families by giving money to DC public schools, public charter schools, and the scholarship program. Each family can pick the right school for their child. Since the program is working, why not reauthorize it? Kids are succeeding academically. The program has been successful.

This program was a turning point in my life. I think that if people have a full understanding of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program and how it has changed my life and the lives of the other kids in the program--they would vote for it. The stricter focus on academics at Archbishop Carroll high school has helped me so much. I am now able to write lyrics for my songs. I plan to go to college and major in physics.

I would implore Mayor Fenty to do something publicly to show his support of the program, even if it meant only saying a couple of words in support. This program gives the youth of DC options. If I could, I would introduce the Mayor to my friends who I know would greatly benefit from having the same opportunity that I have had at Archbishop Carroll. It is these children whose futures are at stake. Even if they allow me to graduate, I am still going to fight for the other youth of D.C.

I would tell Mayor Fenty firmly and strongly that I will simply not quit, not go away, and not give up fighting until other DC youth are provided with the same opportunity for success that I have been given, and we need his support.



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July 10, 2009

**Answers to Post-Hearing Questions for the Record  
Submitted to Dr. Patrick J. Wolf  
From Senator Daniel K. Akaka  
"D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Preserving Choice for All"  
May 13, 2009**

1. According to the three Department of Education Institute for Educational Sciences (IES) study on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (the program), there were no statistically significant gains in mathematics, among boys, or among any group in the first two years.
  - a. What factors do you believe contributed to these findings?

A: I have no concrete evidence regarding why there were no significant impacts of the Opportunity Scholarship Program observed in math. Absent any evidence, I hesitate to speculate why the program generate achievement gains in reading but not in math.

It is important to properly understand the reading results for the gender subgroups. The *difference between the program's effect* on girls (+5.1 scale score points) and its effect on boys (+3.8 scale score points), itself was not statistically significant. Boys did not demonstrate a statistically significant programmatic impact at the subgroup level, but their experience of the program did contribute to the overall statistically significant gains observed in reading and their experience of the program was not significantly different from that of girls as a distinct subgroup.

I have no specific evidence regarding why test score impacts were not observed for the overall sample until the third year of the evaluation. We do know from other education studies that students tend to lose some ground in terms of academic achievement after they switch schools. Participation in a school choice program begins with a school switch, so that may be why it required three years for the treatment students to clearly overtake the control students in reading achievement as a result of the program.

- b. Are these findings consistent with the findings of other voucher programs that you have reviewed?

A: There have been nine other experimental evaluations of voucher and voucher-type scholarship programs in the U.S. besides the OSP impact evaluation. Eight of those nine rigorous studies reported statistically significant achievement gains in at least one subject area for the overall sample or at least some major subgroup of participants. Five of the nine, like the OSP evaluation, reported achievement impacts for the overall sample. Of those five prior experimental voucher studies to report overall statistically significant achievement gains, three reported impacts in both reading and math achievement, one reported impacts in math achievement only, and one reported impacts in an index of combined math and reading achievement. The OSP evaluation is the first rigorous study of a voucher program to report overall achievement impacts in reading but not in math.<sup>1</sup>

2. The intent of the program is to help students from schools in need of improvement (SINI). However, the IES study shows that students from SINI schools demonstrated no statistically significant improvement either in reading or math.
  - a. What factors do you believe contributed to these findings?

A: I have no specific evidence to suggest why students that applied to the program from non-SINI schools have demonstrated statistically significant reading gains as a distinct subgroup whereas students that applied from SINI schools have not demonstrated reading impacts at the subgroup level. Absent such evidence, I hesitate to speculate regarding what factors explain this pattern of results.

- b. Are these findings consistent with the findings of other voucher programs that you have reviewed?

A. No prior school voucher evaluation has examined the achievement impacts of vouchers on SINI and non-SINI applicants as distinct subgroups. Three voucher initiatives besides the OSP – Ohio’s Educational Choice Scholarship Program, Louisiana’s Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program, and Florida’s Opportunity Scholarship Program – have designated applicants from SINI schools as a special or exclusive service priority. The participant effects of these voucher programs have not yet been evaluated, and Florida’s program was declared unconstitutional by the Florida State Supreme Court in 2006.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For support see Patrick J. Wolf, “School Voucher Programs: What the Research Says About Parental School Choice,” *Brigham Young University Law Review*, 2008(2), Table 2 and pp. 435-438, available at <http://lawreview.byu.edu/archives/2008/2/90WOLF.FIN.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Sam Dillon, “Florida Supreme Court Blocks School Vouchers,” *The New York Times*, January 6, 2006, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/06/national/06florida.html>

- c. What percentage of the students surveyed from SINI schools attended faith-based schools?

A. Of the treatment students that applied to the program from SINI schools, 81 percent chose to attend a faith-based school at some time during the first three years of the evaluation.

3. In conducting your review of the program, of the schools that participate, did you examine the standards of accreditation required for teachers? If so, what percentage of teachers at each participating private school was accredited? If not, please explain why accreditation standards are not a component to your review.

A. Our evaluation of the program did not incorporate a review of the standards of accreditation required for teachers. An assessment of accreditation standards was not a component of Congress' statutory mandate for the evaluation.

4. In the IES study, many students who either never used their scholarship or withdrew from the scholarship program cited inadequate programs for students with special needs and lack of academic support for the child at the private school of their choice. How do these findings compare with other research on voucher programs?

A: Most studies of voucher programs targeted to low-income inner-city students have reported that students with learning disabilities are significantly less likely to use such a voucher if offered one.<sup>3</sup> For example, in an evaluation of the privately-funded Washington Scholarship Fund Signature Scholarship Program, my colleagues and I reported that 7.8 percent of the students who used a Signature Scholarship had a learning disability whereas 14.3 percent of the students who declined to use one when it was offered to them had a learning disability.<sup>4</sup> In an evaluation of the privately-funded New York City scholarship program, Daniel Mayer and his colleagues reported that 10 percent of scholarship users had a learning disability compared to 15 percent of scholarship decliners.<sup>5</sup> The New York City evaluation is the only one I am aware of, prior to the OSP evaluation, to report why parents declined to use a voucher. A total of 14 percent of scholarship decliners in that program specifically listed "Has special education needs" as the

<sup>3</sup> See for example William G. Howell, "Dynamic Selection Effects in Means-Tested, Urban School Voucher Programs," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 23(2), 2004, pp. 225-250; David E. Campbell, Martin R. West, and Paul E. Peterson, "Participation in a National, Means-Tested School Voucher Program," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 24(3), 2005, pp. 523-541.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick J. Wolf, Paul E. Peterson, and Martin R. West, *Results of a School Voucher Experiment: The Case of Washington, D.C. After Two Years*, Report of the Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, August 2001, PEPG/01-05, Table 1, <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/PDF/Papers/dclexsum.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Daniel P. Mayer, Paul E. Peterson, David E. Myers, Christina Clark Tuttle, and William G. Howell, *School Choice in New York City After Three Years: An Evaluation of the School Choice Scholarships Program*, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., MPR Reference No.: 8404-045, February 19, 2002, Table 2, p. 45.



reason they did not use the voucher.<sup>6</sup> That specific survey did not offer “Lack of academic support” as a reason for non-use. Research on voucher programs that are limited specifically to students with disabilities confirm that such programs are serving large numbers of such students.<sup>7</sup>

5. According to the most recent IES report, students at private schools were less likely to have access to special programs for non-English speakers, students with learning problems, tutoring, and after-school programs.
  - a. Did you conclude that this contributed to students not participating in the scholarship program or withdrawing from the program?

A: Our research shows that 39 percent of the treatment students that left the OSP cited a lack of academic supports as the primary reason. It also shows that students in the treatment group were significantly less likely to attend schools with in-school tutors, special programs for non-English speakers, and special programs for students with learning problems. Students in the treatment group were as likely as control group students to have used a tutor in school and to have attended a school with a before- or after-school program.<sup>8</sup> We have not examined whether participation in or withdrawal from the scholarship program has been influenced by the degree of access to special programs for non-English speakers, students with learning problems, tutoring, or after-school programs.

- b. In your research, have you found that private schools consistently offer additional academic support and special programs students who need them?

A: In my own review of the research on the characteristics of private schools, my opinion is that private schools vary in the extent to which they are designed to accommodate students with special academic needs and also vary in regards to how they accommodate such students. Some private schools are specifically designed to serve severely disabled students, including students sent to them from public schools that were unable to accommodate such students.<sup>9</sup> Some private schools accept students across the full spectrum of abilities and disabilities and provide special

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Table 3, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> See for example Office of the Utah Legislative Auditor General, *A Performance Audit of the Carson Smith Scholarship for Students with Special Needs*, Report to the Utah Legislature, Number 2008-02, January 2008; Georgia Department of Education, *2008-2009 Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program (GSNS) Preliminary Data Report*, November 18, 2008; Jay P. Greene and Marcus A. Winters, *The Effect of Special Education Vouchers on Public School Achievement: Evidence from Florida's McKay Scholarship Program*, Manhattan Institute Civic Report No. 52, April 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Wolf, Babette Gutmann, Michael Puma, Brian Kisida, Lou Rizzo, and Nada O. Eissa, *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years*, U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, NCEE 2009-4050, March 2009, Table 4-1, p. 55, <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20094050/>

<sup>9</sup> These tend to be higher tuition schools and rarely participate in voucher programs such as the OSP because the voucher amounts cover such a small fraction of their reported costs.

accommodations to those that require them. Many private schools, especially Catholic parochial schools, accept students with mild to moderate spectrum disabilities and fully integrate them into their standard educational program, consistent with the principle of “inclusion.” Some private schools do not accept students with disabilities because they do not have the facilities or programs to serve them appropriately.

6. The most recent IES report shows that parents of students receiving private school vouchers reported higher satisfaction with the quality and safety of the school, but the students were no more likely to be satisfied. Why do you believe this is?

A: I have no way of knowing if the parent or student views of school safety and satisfaction reported in the evaluation are more reliable. I will point out that, although the average scores of the treatment and control group students were statistically similar regarding the overall indexes of student safety and student satisfaction, there were some significant differences between the two groups in their responses to particular safety and satisfaction questions. Treatment group students were less likely than control group students to report being victims of theft or seeing weapons at school.<sup>10</sup> Treatment group students were more likely than control group students to agree with the statements that “My teachers expect me to succeed” and that “Teachers punish cheating when they see it.”<sup>11</sup>

7. The most recent IES report notes that the program provides federally-funded vouchers to facilitate enrollment of income-disadvantaged students to private schools selected by their parents. According to the testimony of Mr. Stewart, the Washington Scholarship Fund conducts an evaluation of students’ academic abilities and directs the student to apply to certain schools based on WSF’s assessment. Additionally, the IEC report shows that 22 percent of the students who were eligible to receive a scholarship were unable to use it because their private school of choice lacked available space.

- a. Did you conduct an evaluation of the Washington Scholarship Fund’s guidance to students who were eligible to participate in the program?

A: To be clear, 22 percent of the 168 treatment group respondents *who did not use a scholarship* gave as a reason that their private school of choice lacked space. These students account for 4 percent of all treatment group respondents in year 3.

We did not examine the specific guidance that WSF provided to families regarding where to apply for admission to a private school, as such an assessment was not a component of Congress’ statutory mandate for the evaluation.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Appendix D, Table D-12.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Appendix D, Table D-14.

- b. Did you review the process parents and students go through in the review, application, and selection of schools?

A: We did not evaluate the process parents and students go through in the review, application, and selection of schools in any detail. We did collect some information on this topic in the very first year the program began operating and it was examined in our initial descriptive report on participation in the OSP.<sup>12</sup> Once the program was more fully implemented, our evaluation focused much more extensively on the program's impacts and not on the process of program implementation.

- c. On average, how many schools did each participant in the program apply to?

A: We have not collected that information.

8. The IES study indicates that only 41 percent of the students offered scholarships used the scholarships consistently over the three-year period of the study. As you know, changing schools can be educationally and socially disruptive for children.

- a. Of the students who remained in the program consistently, how many changed schools over the three years?

A. 38 percent of these students stayed in the same school for all three years, while 62 percent attended more than one school. The school switching observed for these students is likely a combination of school changes that occurred naturally as students moved from elementary to middle school, or from middle school to high school, as well as parental school choices.

- b. What did your research find regarding achievement among students who participated in the program for only part of the study period?

Our analysis focuses on the differences between the treatment group as a whole and the control group as a whole. We do so because our data show that consistent users and partial users differ from each other in important ways.<sup>13</sup> Since we cannot know which members of the control group would have been consistent or partial users, we are not able to make reliable comparisons regarding the impact of the program itself on outcomes

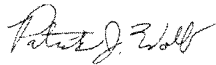
<sup>12</sup> Patrick Wolf, Babette Gutmann, Nada Eissa, Michael Puma, and Marsha Silverberg, *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: First Year Report on Participation*, U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005. [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/dc\\_choice.asp](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/dc_choice.asp)

<sup>13</sup> Patrick Wolf, Babette Gutmann, Michael Puma, Brian Kisida, Lou Rizzo, and Nada O. Eissa, *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years*, U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, NCEE 2009-4050, March 2009, Table 2-4, p. 22, <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20094050/>

separately for those two components of the treatment group that differ in how extensively they used a scholarship.

- c. Of the students who dropped out of the program, how many were from schools in need of improvement?

A total of 191 of the students who previously used a scholarship but declined to use it in the third year were from SINI schools.



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